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TO MY SONS

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WHEN A MAN'S A MAN  
THE WINNING OF BARBARA WORTH  
THE UNCROWNED KING  
LONG AGO TOLD  
MA CINDERELLA

*By Harold Bell Wright and John Lebar*  
THE DEVIL'S HIGHWAY

# TO MY SONS

BY  
Harold Bell Wright



HARPER & BROTHERS PUBLISHERS  
NEW YORK AND LONDON



TO MY SONS

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FIRST EDITION

I-I

TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
MY MOTHER

*"Wharf House"*  
Jamaica, B.W.I.  
May 21, 1932

*"It may be glorious to write  
Thoughts that shall glad the two or three  
High souls, like those far stars that come in sight  
Once in a century;  
But better far it is to speak  
One simple word, which now and then  
Shall waken their free nature in the weak  
And friendless sons of men;  
To write some earnest verse or line,  
Which, seeking not the praise of art,  
Shall make a clearer faith and manhood shine  
In the untutored heart."*

—LOWELL



TO MY SONS



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# TO MY SONS

GILBERT—PAUL—NORMAN

1872—1932

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## I

I THINK IT IS QUITE TIME THAT SOME ONE TOLD YOU boys a few things about your father. I am well aware that for just any person to act upon this suggestion might not be advisable; but, being your father, I feel myself qualified to make the required revelations with a reasonable degree of safety.

Every son, it seems to me, should know something about the life his father lived before they became acquainted. Usually there are reasons why he should know about it from his father. Once a boy comes really to know his father, it is different. After that, the less dad talks about himself the better. I understand, too, that some fathers and sons never do become acquainted. But we are not that sort—which is very fortunate for me. So I propose to tell you some of the things that happened to your dad before you came along and undertook the heavy job of reforming him—I mean, the job of making him over into a passable sort of father.

## TO MY SONS

Please do not understand that I intend writing a regular autobiography with dates and names and everything for you boys or for anyone else. I should say not! I can imagine nothing more tiresome to do or more unnecessary. So do not be alarmed. I shall not tell you all I know about your father—not by a great deal. You may trust me to omit many things which you would not enjoy knowing, which would profit you nothing, and of which I am heartily ashamed. I shall tell the truth about whatever I choose to tell you, but I shall be very careful what I choose to tell. If what I am about to write should, in spots, bear a chronological resemblance to autobiography, it will be only because it happened that way and not because I am in the least autobiographically minded. Life, you know, does not come all in one piece like a cheese; it resembles, more, linked sausages—a series of events all in a string.

You boys know very well that the thought of writing a book about myself would never have occurred to me. It was John M. Siddall who, several years ago, first put the idea into my head.

Mr. Siddall was then editor of *The American Magazine*. He knew a little of my life before I became a writer. He was aware that from my early boyhood I had grown up, for the most part, homeless and friendless; that I had spent much of my youth in a most wretched and debasing environment; and that I had had no schooling beyond the mere beginnings of an education. He said that

## TO MY SONS

because I had, from such unpromising conditions, gained the measure of success which was mine it was my duty to tell the young men who read *The American* how it all happened.

I said I could not write about myself—that the thought of exhibiting myself in print to the rude and uncharitable gaze of the public was abhorrent to me. I argued that my life, whatever it had been, was my own private business and that I proposed to keep it so.

“Sid,” in his characteristic way, insisted that I was all wrong. He said that my experiences would be helpful to thousands of men who were without education or cultural environment and, therefore, I had no right to keep my life to myself.

Finally, I promised that if I could find a way to write my personal experiences and at the same time eliminate the personal pronoun, I would do it.

“Sid” retorted that if I eliminated the personal pronoun the thing wouldn’t be worth a hang—or words to that effect.

So there we hung for several years. Anyone fortunate enough to have known John Siddall will understand why I did not dismiss the matter from my mind.

After Mr. Siddall’s death I thought more and more about this job of writing he had wanted me to do. I had a very great respect for his editorial judgment and a very deep regard for his sterling character. If John Siddall thought it would be good for young men in general to know about my life, might it not be good for my sons?

## TO MY SONS

I reflected, too, that the circumstances of my youth and young manhood were such that there was really no one else who could tell you boys about your father. If I did not reveal to you how it happened that I became the writer of your acquaintance instead of a policeman, a sailor, a bartender, a tinsmith, or any of the thousand and one persons I might have become, you would never know. And this would be another mistake added to the many already to my discredit.

Then you, Gilbert, married Leta and I fell head over heels in love with my daughter. I had always wanted a daughter, and if I could have had one made to order she would have been exactly the girl you chose for me. It is no wonder that I was all stirred up anew. It did not seem fair that my daughter should not know what sort of a father she had undertaken. Then the grandchildren came along and I knew for sure that Mr. Siddall had been right. It would never do at all for Philip and Barbara to grow up without knowing about "grandpa," when he was a little boy.

I remembered, too, that for the last twenty-five or thirty years newspaper and magazine writers in general have not seemed to feel as I have felt on this question of writing about me. Most of the things they have written have been well calculated to make me squirm. When I have read these things I have first been indignant, then I have laughed, then I have been sad. Perhaps my sons, my daughter, and the friends of my latter years will wonder just how much of this that has been written about

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me is true. Perhaps my boys will wonder if, after all, they are really acquainted with their father or if dad has been holding part of himself back. So I began to think that, after all, it might not be so difficult to write about myself if I wrote to you boys.

The fact that I am older than I was may also have something to do with my change of heart. To talk about oneself seems to be a privilege of age. But for youngsters like you it is bad business. I have observed that when a young fellow falls to talking much about himself he usually convinces his hearers that the subject is not worth considering.

The last time I saw Mr. Siddall he said to me: "You are going to write these experiences of yours some day whether you like to do it or not, because it is your job. You will come to see it that way."

Well, I have come to see that to write this book about myself *is* my job. Just as every man's life enters into whatever contribution he makes to his day and generation, the things which I propose to tell you, my sons, have entered into my work. It is all my job.

But even as I write down the reasons for this book I begin to feel the difficulties in this piece of writing which seems to have been given me to do. Merely to put down in chronological order all the incidents of my life as I remember them would be easy enough. But, I repeat, this book is not to be an autobiography—at least it is not to

## TO MY SONS

be that sort of an autobiography. The thing which I propose is quite different.

If, while writing this book, I happen to remember that on certain occasions I met certain persons whose names are sometimes seen in the newspapers, I shall not hold that those incidents must necessarily be recorded. I cannot for the life of me feel that if once I danced with a princess or shot a bear or went on a little journey somewhere that the adventure must necessarily be preserved for posterity. But if meeting a certain person actually set the course which I have more or less faithfully followed all these years—if dancing with the princess gave me, in whole or part, my philosophy of life—if the bear has proven itself a vital force in my work—if the little journey carried me to a point in my thinking from which I have never escaped—*then*, my sons, I shall tell you about it.

What I propose, then, is to look back from 1932 to 1872 and to write down for you as honestly and as clearly as I can those impressions and experiences which, after the slow weaving of sixty years, I see now as the warp and woof of that fabric which I have offered to the world as my work.

But perhaps you will say that I do not know what particular incidents or influences have been most potent in the hands of that destiny which shaped my ends. And perhaps that is true. It may be that no man—least of all the man himself—can know these things which lie beneath the surface of a life. There are depths in the ocean



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which can never be made familiar to us by any sounding apparatus invented by mortal man. In this universe wherein we live there are mysterious forces of which the explorations of science yield only the vaguest hints. And in every human soul there are depths which never give up their secrets; there are forces which no curious investigator can analyze or measure. But the explorer of the ocean deeps does now and then bring up things which suggest a little of what goes on so far beneath the restless surface of the seas. Science, in its search for facts, does find here and there a truth which faintly indicates the nature of these unknown forces. So I think it may be possible to explore one's own life and to bring into the light a few hints of what has been moving beneath the known surface happenings through the years.

In these things which I shall bring to you out of my years which are past, I hope that you, my sons, will find the hints which will lead you to a better understanding of your father. Not that you have ever lacked understanding. No father could have more sympathetic and (I write it humbly) more appreciative sons. Indeed, you have often amazed me by apparently knowing me better than I know myself. But still, as the years advance upon me I crave your even deeper knowledge of my inner self. A craving, I think, which every parent knows. A craving which I suppose can never be fully satisfied.

I shall always regret that I did not write this book before our beloved Paul left us. But I know that you boys who remain believe with me that your brother is not far

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away. Indeed, so real is his presence to me that I could not write to you as intimately as I mean to do without addressing my thoughts to him also. I like to think, too, that Paul now knows many things about his dad that it were better for him in his earth life not to know. Ever the most charitable, the most forgiving and gentlest of souls, he cannot be less so now. So I am glad for him to know even those things which I shall not put in this book. I feel also that our Paul knows now, in a larger way, those larger truths about us all. I mean those inner secret truths which we ourselves only dimly feel and to which we can give no satisfying expression.

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## II

I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER OR NOT YOU BOYS EVER thought of it, but it is exceedingly difficult to get at the real beginning of anything. To uncover the beginnings of anything human is more than difficult—it is impossible. On the way from our tree-top ancestors to our immediate grandparents every soul of us has accumulated an astounding jumble of character ingredients. And no two combinations are alike. To attempt even a guess as to where most of the strange mixture we call an individual comes from is hopeless. Nevertheless the first question in any examination of a life must be what are its beginnings.

For those who are inclined to the game, genealogical nut-gathering is a proper sport. My much loved Auntie Sue, a maiden school-teacher who died at the age of ninety-eight, up to the closing month of her life displayed the most amazing agility in clambering about among the branches of our family tree. The dear old lady succeeded, too, in gathering a considerable store of ancestral pride which enriched her somewhat lonely years and so far as I know never did anyone any harm. As long as Auntie Sue lived there was little danger that I should overlook or belittle an ancestor, and it was chiefly to make her happy that I joined the Sons of the Revolution.

## TO MY SONS

But while I appreciate that ancestors of some sort are more or less a necessity in every well-equipped personality, I have always felt that people who claim high seats in the synagogue, upon the ground that they have ancestors, are like those vegetables whose useful parts must be dug up to be served. Personally, I should be content merely to remark in passing that we are a fairly respectable lot. But it is your right to know something of the particular human plant upon which I have developed into a more or less creditable branch, and you twigs, in your turn, are growing. If you choose to go nut-gathering in the genealogical forest on your own account, that is your affair and—if you get lost—your responsibility.

The word, Wright, which is of Anglo-Saxon derivation, means "a workman," especially an artificer in wood or hard materials. This may have something to do with the peculiar turn of mind which causes me to think of myself always as a workman. I look upon writing as my job. My study, to me, is a workshop. Paper, pencils, pens, ink, thesaurus, dictionary—these are the tools of my craft. It may also account for the fact that my chief recreational delight is my carpenter shop and forge, where, when I am weary of building novels, I make things of wood or iron or copper. Cards mean nothing to me. I have never come under the spell of golf or any of the kindred sports. But to make something—to fashion a thing with my hands—that, to me, is a joy. During all these years when I have been chiefly engaged in labor which taxed my re-

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luctant brain more than my too-willing hands, I have been indignant at the common implication that only those who perform physical tasks are truly workmen. I resent this restriction placed so unjustly upon one of the noblest words in our language. And when you, Gilbert, dedicated your first book to your father, "a good workman," I felt that your understanding choice of the word conferred upon me an honor greater than any that societies, foundations, or governments could bestow.

The family has been honorably known in England for centuries. The arms were granted June 20, 1509, to the Wrights of Essex. There is a branch in Scotland, and one adventurous lad went with Cromwell to Ireland and started a line of Irish Wrights. If you are interested to look, you will find us in "Colonial Families" and in most of the records of this country beginning with William and Priscilla, who "came over" in the *Fortune* in 1621. The rosters of the American Revolution give the names of ten captains and lieutenants. Privates seem to have counted for as little then as they do now. We have been authors, educators, preachers, reformers, poets, farmers, missionaries, scientists, doctors, lawyers, governors, and Heaven knows what else. As a science, genealogy is a joke. Who ever heard of ancestors who were thieves and murderers? It is hard to believe that all the blue-blooded scoundrels of those old days were childless.

Many times I have wished there had not been so many kinds of us. It has made me so complicated. If only those who are responsible for me had concentrated more, I am

## TO MY SONS

sure I should have been satisfied to be one thing only. As it is, I have all my life been cursed with an unholy urge to be all of my ancestors at the same time, which has scattered me with more or less disastrous results. It is no wonder that you, Norman, are finding it a bit difficult to decide what your life work is to be. As you wrote me during your freshman year, "there are so darned many interesting things to do." You can't help it, son; it is in your blood.

The book of the Wrights in which we are most interested opens in County Essex, England, along in 1500. From South Weald, County Essex, we emigrated to America and are found in Wethersfield, Connecticut, in 1640, where your many times great-grandfather, Thomas, was a deputy to the General Court. A few steps more down the stairway of our generations and our Reverend Ebenezer, a graduate of Yale in 1724, is preaching at Stamford, Connecticut. It is said that Ebenezer was a powerful preacher, and I think he must have been, because his son, another Ebenezer, went to war and became one of those Lieutenant Wrights in the Continental service. I enjoy thinking that young "Eb" fought as well as his daddy preached, and on the whole I am rather glad that we, in our two Ebenezers, were among those venturesome souls who started this noble experiment familiarly known as the U. S. A.

Young Ebenezer and his brother Thomas married sisters—Wethersfield girls they were, daughters of Benjamin Butler—and when the War of Independence was

## TO MY SONS

finally over, Lieutenant Eb and his wife, Grace, with their daughter and five sons and his brother Tom, with his wife, Martha, and their brood of little Wrights moved to Oneida County, New York. They settled in the Mohawk Valley wilderness not far from Fort Stanwix, where later the town of Rome was built and the modern city now stands.

“Who’s Who” says that I was born in Rome, May 4, 1872, and I have always been glad that Lieutenant Ebenezer and Grace, who were your three times great-grandparents, picked this particular bit of our country for me to be born in. The neighborhood is so rich in historical, legendary, and literary lore, I really must tell you about it.

The Mohawk River and Wood Creek are here only about a mile apart. The Mohawk flows toward the southeast and joins the Hudson in its course to the sea. The waters of Wood Creek flow westward to Oneida Lake and by way of the Oswego River to Lake Ontario, finding the sea at last in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, hundreds of miles north of where the Hudson meets the ocean tides. This narrow bit of land between the Mohawk and Wood Creek was an old portage used by the Indians for no one knows how many ages; used by Dutch and English traders for nearly two centuries. Fort Bull and Fort Williams, each in its time, were built to protect this important link between the two great waterways. Each in its time, they were taken by the French or destroyed by the Indians. In

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1758 Fort Stanwix was erected, and a permanent settlement began.

It was here in 1769 that Sir William Johnson and representatives of Virginia and Pennsylvania met with three thousand two hundred Indians of the Six Nations and surrendered to the Crown what is now Kentucky, West Virginia, and western Pennsylvania. The old fort was dismantled and in 1776 rebuilt and renamed Fort Schuyler, but the old name of Stanwix clung to it in popular usage. On August 2, 1777, the fort was besieged by St. Leger's forces, and it was here early on Sunday morning, August 3, 1777, that our flag, the Stars and Stripes, was first raised in the face of an enemy. The flag was made from pieces of clothing contributed by members of the garrison. It is said that the garrison's successful resistance to St. Leger contributed greatly to the American victory at Saratoga. Here, in 1784, a treaty was concluded by representatives of the United States and the chiefs of the Six Nations. It was in 1789 that Ebenezer and Thomas, with their wives, families, and belongings, arrived. The neighborhood where they built their log houses, about three miles up the river from the fort, is still known as Wright Settlement.

Among the household effects which Ebenezer and Grace brought from Wethersfield was a tall chest of drawers called a "highboy." You boys are familiar with that ancient piece of furniture which now occupies a place of honor in our home in Tucson, Arizona.



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Often when I look upon the old highboy, as it stands in all the dignity of its years, I muse: if only it could speak, what tales it might tell! It must have listened very gravely, I think, to Ebenezer and Grace as they talked in the privacy of their chamber when the storm of the Revolution was gathering over the land. And what tears of mingled pride and fear it must have witnessed when the storm broke and the husband and father marched away to war. What prayers it must have heard as Grace knelt in her lonely room or gathered her brood of little ones about her knees. What hours of anxiety, of loneliness and dread, of hopes and fears, it shared through those years when the land was tortured with the travail of giving birth to a new nation. What rejoicing in those hours of victory when the soldier husband and father returned. I think our old highboy must have held its breath with interest when Ebenezer first tentatively suggested to Grace that they "go West." And many were the doubts and hopes raised in its hearing; many the grave questions discussed by husband and wife in its presence before the momentous move was finally decided upon. What generations of baby-clothes have been stored in that old chest of drawers. What garments of the passing ages. How many hands have touched that dark polished wood and fingered those brass handles. Mother hands, father hands, aimlessly groping baby hands; hands of childhood and youth; bride and groom hands; hands thin and trembling, blue-veined and old; happy hands, hurrying to dress for

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party or festival; patient, tender hands, ministering to the sick; sad hands, making ready for the burial.

From Wethersfield to the Hudson River this old highboy was transported by ox team. It journeyed up the Hudson to Albany on a sloop. From Albany it was hauled by ox team up the Mohawk Valley to its new home in what was then "the West." To Arizona it came across the continent by railway train. When it passes on to you, Gilbert, or to you, Norman, I suppose it will travel via air express. Who knows by what means of transportation it will be passed on from generation to generation in the future?

Will this ancient piece of furniture be called upon again to witness the birth of a new freedom? Will it watch once more a patriot father offering himself and his loved ones upon the dreadful altar of war for the salvation of their native land? Will it hear again the prayers of a patriot mother? Will it help still another generation of pioneers to build a new country? With all my heart I hope that if these events should come to pass, the Wrights of that day will be true to all that our old highboy has shared in its long association with the family. If I felt it could be otherwise, I swear I would give the veteran honorable burial, rather than that the glory of its memories should be lost in shame!

Ebenezer and Grace, and Thomas and Martha, organized the first religious society in Oneida County. In 1800 they started the first church in Rome.

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The wilderness was cleared, the land was planted, the harvests reaped. The children grew. More and more Wrights were born. A cemetery was started on a hillside overlooking the valley and the river. As white settlers arrived in ever-increasing numbers, the Indians withdrew. Roads were built. Schools and churches were established. Log cabins were replaced by more pretentious homes. And again, in 1861, we were saying good-bye to our women folk and marching off to war.

I have read that the seventy-five thousand volunteers called for by Lincoln were supplied three or four times over and I think this must be true, because there were now so many Wrights. Conforming to the custom of pioneers in every land and age, we had multiplied exceedingly.

The soldier Wright in whom our interest centers was William A., a great-grandson of Lieutenant Ebenezer. Will was little more than a boy, not quite twenty, when he enlisted, but four years later when he came home with a bullet wound, a pair of spurs, a lieutenant's sword, a soldier swagger, and a big black mustache, he was, the old Romans tell me, "considerable of a man." From my acquaintance with him in later years, I can easily imagine how bravely he went prancing about to balls and parties with his red sash and shoulder straps, his jingling spurs and shining sword. And why not? Had he not marched and fought and suffered and bled with the best of his fellow heroes? Who, now, will deny him his full share of personal glory in the general victory? Certainly not I.

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I only wish that we all might be as fully justified in our prancing.

Perhaps, too, it was a bit of the old Lieutenant Ebenezer stirring in the blood of Lieutenant Will. I'll venture that those old Revolutionary boys let out a hearty "whoop" or two when their war was over. In fact, I have never observed any of the Wrights being too conservative when they thought they had anything to prance about. I confess that in thoughtless moments I have permitted our old ones to step a little high in me. As often, too, I have blushed with shame when the exhibition was over and the heat of my self-esteem had cooled. I know of nothing more embarrassing than being forced to tell one-self face to face that one has over-indulged in swelling talk. A donkey is never quite so much an ass as when he shucks his honest burden and cavorts all over the premises as if he thinks he can persuade his audience that he is a Kentucky blue-grass champion.

In any case, Lieutenant Will pranced and swaggered and, Othello-like, recited his war adventures to some purpose, for a beautiful girl, Alma Watson, one of the belles of the countryside, looked and listened most attentively. The inevitable wedding followed, and the pair recklessly assumed the responsibility of becoming my parents.

A few years ago I received from a kindly stranger a packet of letters written by my mother when she was a girl, to her father who had left his Eastern home in "forty-nine" for the gold fields of California. By some

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strange chance these letters had been preserved, hidden away, and forgotten through the long years, to be discovered by accident and forwarded to me.

Mother's mother died when she was a baby and her father's sister Mary raised little Alma with her own daughter, Minnie. They lived on a farm near Rome. The first letter was dated February, 1859, and little Alma calls her father's attention to the fact that she will be "twelve years old next August." The last letter in the packet was written when she was eighteen. All together they give me an accurate picture of my mother's girlhood. She writes of school, farm life, pets, sleighing in winter, flower-gardening in spring, strawberrying and fishing in summer. She tells of her Christmas presents, her knitting, her books, her parties. In one letter she announces proudly that she is five feet tall. In another is a strand of her hair. One letter, from Aunt Mary to her brother, says that it would be hard to imagine two happier, healthier girls than Alma and Minnie. And it must have been true, because every letter covering those years of her girlhood overflows with happiness and the joy of living.

As Alma grows older she writes of graver things—of Douglas and Lincoln, of the war and of the flag floating over the house. When she is seventeen she is attending "Stanwix Academy" and is very much interested in her drawing lessons and in her music. That year she writes: "Aunt Mary, Minnie and myself live on the farm grandpa bought the first of April. It is two miles north of Rome. It is called Wright Settlement."

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Imagine my emotion when in reading these letters, which so vividly pictured to me my mother's girlhood, I came suddenly upon one in a bold masculine hand:

Rome, Sept. 24th, 1865.

G. K. Watson, Esq.,

Dear Sir:

I wish it were possible for me to address you face to face but as that cannot be allow me the honor of addressing you by letter.

About a year & a half ago I became acquainted with your accomplished & highly esteemed daughter, Alma. Since that time our acquaintance has ripened into a warmer feeling and the object of this letter is to obtain your consent to our union.

It may be proper for me to state here that it is not my intention to marry immediately for the reason that I have no home in which to place her of my own. But I leave for the West this fall for that purpose and hope by a year from this time to be able to place her in a home as pleasant and agreeable as the one she now occupies. If not I shall never ask her to leave it until I can.

The business I intend to pursue is that of farming. I consider it the most healthy, pleasant & independent of all.

Hoping that you will return a speedy & favorable answer

I remain

Very Respectfully

Your Abdt Servant

WM. A. WRIGHT

Poor Lieutenant Will—with all his brave prancing, his war stories, and his pride of ancestry! His intentions were of the best, but his promises were never fulfilled. He

## TO MY SONS

never succeeded in providing that "home as pleasant and agreeable" as the one from which he took his young bride. His "business of farming" was a pitiful failure. Instead of that "healthy, pleasant and independent life," he lived as a poor carpenter, working by the day, dragging his wife and children from place to place, existing from hand to mouth, sinking deeper and deeper, as the years passed, into the slough of wretched poverty. I think the bravely swaggering lieutenant's spirit was broken when the passing of war time reduced him from his proud position of a staff officer to the ranks of common workaday folk. He never seemed to recover from the humiliation except on those occasions when, inspired by "John Barleycorn," he lived again the glories of the past.

He never remained in any one place long enough to establish a home, and each move in turn was made because some old G.A.R. comrade enticed him to a new field with fresh opportunities for reminiscences. When the war stories of the new field were exhausted, and the accompanying flow of whisky diminished, he moved on, at the call of some other comrade, to fresh territory. When Alma was moved for the last time and her sons were scattered among strangers, Lieutenant Will, with greater freedom, continued his wandering, reminiscing career until at last he went to be again with the wife of his youth in the only permanent home they ever knew—the old Wright Settlement Cemetery.

Lieutenant Will and Alma began their married life in South Pass (now Cobden), Illinois, in the country home

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of Charles E. Wright, about a mile from "Bell's Hill." Later they moved to a home of their own in the same neighborhood and here their first son, William, was born.

From South Pass they returned to Wright Settlement, where they lived for a time with Will's parents at Spring Brook Farm in the house which his grandfather, Deacon Allen Wright, built in 1820, following the log-cabin era. It was here that I was born. It happened in the same room where my father with nine brothers and sisters, and I know not how many other little Wrights, first landed in this strange old world. I wonder if many of our modern young couples would dare to occupy this prolific chamber.

Mother, I think, must have loved the beautiful country about South Pass. As you shall learn, she was ever a lover of the fields and woods and hills. And I know she was very fond of those friends of her bridal days, the Bells, who lived on "Bell's Hill," because it was from them that I have my middle name.

I can imagine, too, that during those months when she was expecting me, her second child, Alma may not have been too happy living at Spring Brook Farm with her husband's people. True, she had returned to the scenes of her happy girlhood, but it was all very different now. She was only eighteen when Lieutenant Will wrote her father, asking for her hand. The memories of her care-free, joyous life before the coming of her hero from the war were still vivid. The promises and the dreams of her engagement days were not yet old. South Pass, the place to which she had gone as a bride, the friends who were a



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part of that early wedded happiness, the very scenes amid which she and her hero husband had first set up their family altar—all this must have been much in her mind. Perhaps, already, the shadow of her dreary future had appeared. She must have been driven often, I think, to take refuge within herself.

And who shall say that Alma's unborn son had no share in her inner life? Certain it is that my mother endowed me with a love of nature which has been one of the most potent influences through all my years. She endowed me, too, with an almost fanatical craving for independence, a disposition to idolize my friends, and a capacity for living too much within myself. My brother, Will, the first-born, was a Wright, a reproduction of his father. But I am my mother's son, so like her in features and ways and spirit that in my boyhood those who knew her as a girl marveled at the likeness.

At the time of my arrival in the neighborhood and for some years following, nearly every farmhouse within sight of my birthplace sheltered a family of Wrights. Many of them, from the hillside cemetery, still watch over the land they so bravely won from the wilderness. Many are scattered far over the world. Only a few of the ancestral acres are held today by the descendants of those from whom Wright Settlement has its name. Indeed, in our immediate branch of the family—I mean the descendants of William B., son of Allen, who built the house at Spring Brook Farm—the very name, even, seems to be fading slowly from the world of the living. My

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brother George, our cousin Othneil, and myself are the only men of our generation. You, Gilbert and Norman, are all, now, in your generation. And little Philip, the great-great-great-great-grandson of pioneer Ebenezer, is the only boy of his generation, in our immediate line from William B., to perpetuate the name. It seems a grave responsibility for such a little chap.

But I would not have you think that I hold too lightly the privilege of being well-born. The sometimes foolish pride of ancestry is at bottom a noble pride. If our forefathers lived in honor and served God and their country worthily, it is well to feel their blood stirring in us to similar living.

Much of the talk about human equality is ill-considered and empty. There is no such thing as equality among human beings or anywhere else. The law of *inequality* is the law by which all life is preserved and perpetuated. One man is not as good as another, any more than one horse or one dog is as good as another. There are human plugs and mongrels and ill-bred vicious beasts enough, Heaven knows. Look about you. It is true that some of the low-grades are well fed, well groomed, and toggged out in costly trappings, but that does not alter their natures. A gold-mounted harness never yet transformed an ill-bred scrub into a thoroughbred.

Nor does the term, "well-bred," as I understand it, mean only those whose names appear in more or less authentic genealogies. A thoroughbred by some chance

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may have missed being recorded in the studbook; the good horse is not less a thoroughbred for that. Breeding will manifest itself in performance. It is the character of thoroughbreds which gives value to their family records. When a person exhibits consistently those traits of character which are universally accepted as characterizing the highest type of the race, then, I say, that person is well-bred, whether or not the breeding is a matter of record. Wealth, social advantages, schools—these may result in a surface polish that seems to indicate good blood. But look beneath the acquired manners for motives, guiding principles, instinctive reactions and impulses: in these, I say, you will find evidence of the quality of breeding. If one thinks, acts, lives, like a well-bred person, you may rely upon it that person has good blood. If one thinks, acts, lives, like a low, selfish, vicious beast, you may be sure that person is ill-bred though he have the manners of a prince and his name be recorded in a dozen genealogies.

To expect these human scrubs to show the spirit of thoroughbreds or perform like well-born people is a great mistake. Indeed, it is the only social error of any real consequence. Civilization itself can endure only by placing adequate emphasis upon inequality and the importance of being well-born.

If, as a nation, we continue for another generation to surrender so large a part of our civic and national leadership to men whose only claim to office rests upon the political backing of the degenerate and vicious, our chil-

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dren's children will pay a staggering price for our idiotic notions as to what constitutes equality. A few more years of the sort of equality we are enduring now, and all the king's horses and all the king's men will not be able to put our Humpty-Dumpty freedom together again. Equality in breeding? No. Equality in minds? No. Equality in living? No. Equality in loyal citizenship? No. Equality in ability? No. Equality in responsibility? Yes. The measure of one's responsibility is the exact measure of one's ability. The claim of a man, whatever his mental, physical, or moral equipment, upon the brother who is able to help—the just right of the incompetent to be led and the obligation of the competent to lead, *equality in responsibility*—that is the star to which we must hitch our Wagon of State if we expect ever to arrive anywhere.

What do you suppose that old hidebound, freedom-bent, preachin', fightin' crowd of Pilgrim-Revolutionary Wrights would do today with Prohibition, gang rule, Wall Street, the menace of machinery, the modern school and church, the League of Nations and our down-to-date brand of patriotism, as it is manifested in present-day politics? A fine lot of problems have developed out of the beautiful theories of government which those old boys, in their heaven-born optimism, left for us to put into practice. I should like to appoint our Reverend Ebenezer and Lieutenant Ebenezer to sit on a committee of what-to-do-now and see what would happen. This is something for you boys to think about. And, believe me, you had better be thinking about it. It will not be so many years, now,

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until I shall be in a position, perhaps, to discuss these questions with our old Ebenezers, but nothing I may learn from them in the sweet bye-and-bye will help you in the sweet now-and-now.

Our forefathers, in their wisdom, handed us the makings of these problems. To date it appears that we have only succeeded in multiplying perplexities without really solving anything. We have made the simple so complex, the direct so confusing, the straightforward so intricate, the clear so obscure, that we go blithering and babbling and blundering about without arriving anywhere. In a maze of social, religious, economic, and governmental tangles, we are too bewildered to think straight, see clearly, or act with any degree of conviction. My generation is handing over to yours a sad mess, and I dare not hazard even a guess as to what you will do with it. I know only that you must do something, or what it will do to you is not pleasant to contemplate. I have long been of the opinion that you boys are bound to participate in events as stirring as those which fired the blood of our God-fearing, patriotic ancestors. How anyone can complacently believe that we today have attained the highest peak in human affairs, and in the face of all history affirm that there can never be another revolution, is past my understanding. If Brother Capone, and Cousin Bolshevik, and Uncle Graft, and Nephew Racket, and all their ill-begotten relatives do not succeed in forcing the grandest family row the world has ever witnessed, it will be because God in His mercy decides to squelch the lot of us together.

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Of this only am I sure: If as citizens of this republic, you today can hold fast to the faiths and principles which inspired the fathers of our country, and view through their eyes the meaning and the purpose of our government, you will serve your country well though you stand alone among ten million. No citizen father could ask less of his citizen sons; no father could expect more.

It is generally conceded, I believe, that a reasonable amount of self-respect is good for any man. I am sure it has been good for me. Just as I have known that certain great souls with whom it has been my good fortune to associate were of a finer mental and spiritual quality than I, so I have held myself as better than some with whom circumstances forced me to live. Because I know that you, my sons, are better born than some, I have expected you to live better lives than some. May I add here that in your lives, your ideals, what you are and what you stand for, I am happy to have my confidence in good breeding justified?

But lest you think too highly of yourselves, I hasten to confess that as I look back now upon my own life I cannot rid myself of the conviction that some of our ancestors were not all that they should have been. Many things which I shall not put in this book I charge to these old ones, from whose influence I have often desired to be free. But much as I wish that I might have escaped those who have not lived in me for good, I know that from his blood no man can be free, and that I in my turn have

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passed on to you, my sons, not alone the good that was bred in me but the evil also.

This law of passing on what we are to those we love I know, now, to be at once the gravest responsibility and the greatest joy of fatherhood. But I know it too late. If in my boyhood I could have been made to understand that the character-forming forces which for good or ill went into the making of my life must inevitably be passed on by me into the lives of my sons, I am sure I would have resisted with greater effort some influences and with greater eagerness welcomed others.

No, you boys cannot choose your ancestors; for better or for worse, I have passed them on to you. But it is possible for you to side-track some of those old ones who were not so good and so in the lives of your children to clear the main line for the best of them. It is up to you to set the switch. If only our ancestors were *all* of the quality which Auntie Sue imagined them, what an easy game life would be!

I think I can see you smiling as you read this. "Another of dad's little preachments," you will say. All right, I'm guilty. But if I do sometimes delight in preaching at you a bit, it is because I have never known an audience so appreciative. So put this in your pipes and smoke it: If you ever grow weary of dad's preaching, just don't listen with such flattering attention.

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### III

WHEN YOU READ THIS BOOK I AM WRITING TO YOU, my sons, you must bear in mind that in omitting so many incidents which might fittingly be included in a regular autobiography I do not mean to imply that these experiences played no part in shaping my life. I know that even the most trivial incidents of one's earliest childhood often are factors of major importance in the sum total of a personality. But most of these influences are like those mists which, though invisible to the eye, nevertheless materially affect the quality of the sunlight. I am stressing only those experiences which appear clearly to me, now, as definite and positive forces in shaping my career. To place these experiences clearly before you, I must necessarily give you their settings.

I have no memories of my father and mother or anyone else at Spring Brook Farm. The only incident I recall of that period—and it is the first thing I remember—is that of being placed on my back in a manger full of hay under the nose of a gentle farm horse. I have no mental picture of any person in connection with the experience, but the sweet smell of the hay has lingered in my senses



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through all these years. I can shut my eyes now and feel the soft muzzle of the animal against my side as it reached for another mouthful of the fragrant timothy while I laughed and wriggled and with childish glee patted the big friendly head.

Is it strange that with such a start, I should, all my life, wish that I might be a farmer? Does this explain my love for horses? Is this why there are so many horses in my books? Is this why I do not care for automobiles and use them only because I must?

In sixty years I have come a long, long way from Spring Brook Farm. Progress now decrees that there shall be no manger memories. The world has exchanged the sweet fragrance of hay for the stench of gasoline and the deadly monoxide. The down-to-date baby is born in a machine-shop and cradled in a garage. Farm horses are becoming as strange to us as those prehistoric creatures that our scientists delight to dig up and reassemble.

Well, perhaps Progress knows best. I am not yet a candidate for that class of dotard to whom only the old days appear good. I can recognize virtue even in an automobile. But while I may admire, I shall never like the devilish things. Secretly, sometimes not so secretly, I glory in the reflection that all the mechanical engineers and inventors in Christendom could never make a single hair of a horse. Perhaps I feel as I do because I know that God has a hand in the making of horses and that autos are mostly made by corporations. In other words, to me the

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difference between an automobile and a horse is the difference between Henry Ford and God.

They took me away from Spring Brook Farm while I was still a baby, but they have never succeeded in taking away my memories of the manger, the hay, and the friendly farm horse.

Lieutenant Will moved his little family next to Whitesboro, a village on the Erie Canal, between Rome and Utica.

The beginning of this Whitesboro period of my childhood is hidden from me now as in a thick gray fog. But presently out of this pre-memory mist, shadowy forms begin to appear. I begin to see the first dim outlines of myself, to identify people and places and things, and to establish more or less definite relationships with life.

We lived in a neighborhood where the poor houses stood close together and were as alike as so many bricks. There were no porches and no front yards. Flights of steps connected the front doors immediately with the sidewalk. This was a great convenience for a householder too drunk to navigate a more difficult entrance to his harbor home. The only drawback to the arrangement being that all the houses were so cruelly alike that sometimes an honest tenant stumbled up the wrong steps and landed in his neighbor's berth. When this happened, it was considered a great joke. The back yard, walled in by a high and dilapidated board fence, was a place for mother to hang the wash, which she seemed to be always doing. It

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was also a handy place to dump all sorts of refuse—cinders and empty bottles and cast-off shoes and scraps of clothing that managed to escape being made into rag carpets.

Sometimes father worked as a carpenter. Sometimes he labored in the planing-mill on the farther bank of the canal. Between spells of industry he entertained and was entertained by his old war comrades at the tavern. Often my brother and I would be sent with a tin pail to the tavern and the man behind the bar would fill the pail with dark, foaming liquor which smelled and tasted bitter. Nearly always we were instructed to ask the man to charge it. Mother never sent us on these errands to the tavern, nor did she ever share what was in the pail. And sometimes father seemed queer and talked big about himself—told who he was and what great things he had done. I did not in the least know then what it all meant. To me, my father was the greatest man in the world. My most vivid Whitesboro recollection of Lieutenant Will was when he wore his uniform with shoulder straps and sash and sword and spurs and rode a horse on the occasion of a G.A.R. reunion.

My brother and I played in the streets and alleys and back yards with youngsters of the neighborhood. As we grew older we ventured farther—along the banks of the canal in the vicinity of the planing-mill or the soap factory. Sometimes we went as far as the Mohawk River or explored the fields and woods that lay beyond the canal. In summer we earned a few pennies picking berries for

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a farmer who lived on a hill. I do not remember school—only that the winters were terribly cold. But I remember Sunday school and church, because attendance was such a punishment and the minister wore what I thought was a nightgown and, for a while, father sang in the choir.

Will and I had scarlet fever. A baby brother came, remained with us two years, and went away—frightened, perhaps, at the outlook. It was not much of a funeral, as funerals go; but it was a memorable occasion for me because of the long ride—fifteen or twenty miles—to the old Wright Settlement cemetery. There was only one carriage in the procession. Father drove. Mother held the tiny coffin on her knees.

That Whitesboro environment could not have been very wholesome for Alma's boys, who were just beginning to reach out for life with all their young and eager senses. That backyard-street-and-alley playground was bound to give us certain playmates who were already well schooled in vice. The atmosphere of the tavern with its gang of loafers was poison to our tender minds. The poverty which so uncompromisingly shut the door in the face of beauty and so heartily welcomed every form of ugliness did not make for the early forming of right ideals or beget a taste for wholesomeness. We were learning, all too fast, things it would have been better for us never to know.

I do not think that, in Whitesboro, Alma gave up all hope of that promised home which was to have been as "pleasant and agreeable" as the home of her girlhood.

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But I am quite sure that the bright colors with which Lieutenant Will had painted his alluring pictures must already have become somewhat faded. The country life which she so loved and which was to have been so "healthy, pleasant and independent" had been abandoned for the hand-to-mouth existence with a not too industrious, tavern-loving, small-town carpenter. Instead of that home of her dreams, she was living in a poor rented house as unattractive as its environment was ugly. Already the "beautiful and accomplished girl" had become the overworked housekeeper, cook, washwoman, scrubwoman, wife and mother. But in spite of these early defeats, I am sure Alma had not surrendered. Indeed, I know now that she never surrendered. But I can understand how at this time she began to fight, as she fought to the day of her death, not for the realization of those girlhood dreams of her own future but for the future of her sons.

She was a daintily fashioned woman—slender and not tall, with tiny hands and feet. The gloves she wore at her wedding came into my possession after I was a man grown, and I could not believe that my mother had ever worn them. I doubt if she ever weighed much over a hundred pounds. Her eyes were gray and thoughtful, rather than merry, but ever quick to smile. Her hair was dark brown, with a glint of bronze light in the sun. These details, of course, came to me later on as I grew older.

As I look back across the years now, I see her first as a dim, shadowy presence, vaguely felt rather than clearly visioned. Nearly always she is in the kitchen, cooking or

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scrubbing the floor or bending over a washtub. She is always associated in my mind with the odors of fried potatoes, buckwheat cakes and coffee, dirty clothes boiling, steaming soapsuds, and the smell of diapers drying on a rack by the stove.

Then suddenly she seems to step out of the mists; and instead of a shadowy presence, felt rather than seen, I have a memory of her so clear and definite that I might have seen her yesterday. It is not too much to say that this experience made so vivid and lasting an impression upon my sensitive young mind and soul that it has colored my whole life. Not only has it been an important factor in the development of my own character but it has been a most potent influence in everything I have written.

The incident itself was childishly simple. Mother took me to the kitchen and, with what I thought was the rag she used to clean the stove and the outside of cooking-pots and pans, and with laundry soap and ashes, thoroughly scrubbed out my mouth. She could not endure, she explained, that one of her boys should have a mouth so filthy with dirty talk.

I realize, of course, that I was born with a sensitiveness which all my life has enabled me to receive impressions from the most trivial incidents and to feel deeply the impact of life's forces. With this I was given that power of imagination which has enabled me to translate experience, observation, and emotion into the language of fiction. And it is clear to me now that it was these inborn characteristics of my being which made this childhood ex-

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perience so far-reaching in its effect. I think, too, that mother knew the nature of this son with whom she had to deal, and chose the most effective means of driving home the lesson. Many other punishments I received, and straightway forgot as readily as a boy forgets to wash behind his ears. But this particular lesson in cleanliness—Ugh! I can shut my eyes this minute and taste that dirty rag and soap and ashes. I can still feel, too, the burning shame, the humiliation, the utter horror that my mother should be forced to take such measures.

That first vivid memory of mother gave me an almost fanatical abhorrence of dirty talk, whether in speech or in print. In those years following mother's death, when I was forced to struggle for sheer existence in a world where I literally had not one friend whose influence could count for decent living, I learned to accept and to use rough talk with profanity a-plenty. It was the common language of my class. My only associates during the character-forming years of early manhood were men who violated every law of decency. God knows I, myself, committed sins enough to absolve me from any charge of squeamishness. In those days, too, I tried honestly to overcome my feeling toward the filthy story, the indecent word, and the obscene jest. I was ashamed to be so thin-skinned. But it was no use. I never recovered from the shock of that dirty rag, soap, and ashes treatment.

Understand me, I do not mean that this antipathy of mine is toward all talk which until recent years has been

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commonly held to be unprintable. Not at all. When you, Gilbert, were a lad of nine you expressed the thought I am trying to put over. As youngsters will, you had settled upon a certain man as your ideal and pattern of what a man should be. He happened to be a hard-boiled ranch foreman, and I watched your boyish devotion to him with no little interest. Then one day, when you were singing hymns in praise of your hero, you suddenly caught the idea that for some reason dad was not too enthusiastic about your paragon of manhood. You puzzled a moment, then burst out with: "I know, dad. Joe cusses a lot, but . . . but . . . *it's good clean cussin'.*"

No, the distinction is not trivial.

This particular kink which mother put in the thread of my mental development has caused me no end of trouble in my career as a novelist. But I have never blamed mother for that. How could she know? You see, until I began to write books I could conceal my distaste for those modern literary masterpieces which are commonly read behind closed doors and which are never left in sight of a caller whose respect one values. My lack of appreciation of those intellectuals whose imaginings are unmentionable (except in print) attracted no serious attention. But this idiosyncrasy was naturally bound to show itself in my work. The moment I got myself into print, in any sizable editions, the jig, for me, was up. I am occasionally, now, reminded that it still is.

But for the life of me I cannot understand why because I do not care for polecats I should be charged with



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loving Pollyannas. A sticky atmosphere of sickening sweetness is as enervating to me as it must ever be to those who live close to earth. The truth is, I delight in dirt—a rich, sandy loam preferred. But I want my dirt clean, strong, earthy; the sort of dirt in which grows the stuff that feeds the souls of men. “The Good Earth,” by the way, for me, ranks as one of the greatest of our modern novels. In the hands of too many of our modern writers the same material of which this book is composed, would have been wrought into a story which no person with any sense of decency would read.

It is not a question of the ability of literary artists. The author of “The Good Earth” is a great artist, certainly. And Mr. Blank, who apparently finds his inspiration in public comfort stations and gathers from the cesspools and sewers of life the stinking materials for the intellectual feast to which he invites his readers may be as an artist equally great. It is a question of the spirit that animates the artist. The spirit of “The Good Earth” is as fine, rugged, true, and wholesome as the soil furrowed by the farmer’s plow. The book is as vital and right as a growing plant. It is no more indecent than the parade of pure-bred stallions at a stock show. The spirit that animates Mr. Blank’s art is the nasty spirit that scribbles obscene lines in public places. After all, one writes the sort of thing one writes because one’s mind is mostly occupied with that sort of thing.

Nor do I feel that my breadth of mind is limited. I know that I am capable of appreciating the ability of a

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writer even when he exercises his genius in ways abhorrent to me. I am a staunch admirer of that noble bird the buzzard. I look up to him as to a king of the skies. No feathery creature exceeds the dignity, grace, and beauty of his soaring flight. As he floats high above the firmament, the scope of his view is magnificent. As he sweeps majestically over mountain and valley and plain, the range of his observations is tremendous. His performance on the wing fills me with delight and envy. He makes me feel a poor crawling earthbound thing. But I'm hanged if I'll stand for his taste or sit down to dinner with him. I would rather dine with a common rat. The taste of some of these modern, self-styled intellectuals, who soar so high over my lowly head, would gag a buzzard.

These indecencies in present-day books and plays are all the more revolting because they are so unnecessary. Their offense is inexcusable. They cannot be justified on the grounds of art, because certainly art is not limited to the obscene. They are not, as so many pretend to think, the product of intellectuals. The quality of the thought evidences the caliber of the thinker. Minds which habitually feed upon obscenities have no capacity for great thinking. Such mentalities are rather in the class of those poor degenerates who are often to be pitied rather than censored.

Neither are these books and plays excusable on the grounds of their earnings. Poor authors must live somehow, of course, and it sometimes appears that the poorest of us, in the quality of our work, reap the most bountiful

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harvest of royalties. But, art aside, it can easily be shown that the greatest money-makers have been decent. The great majority of outstanding box-office successes—the plays that have run year after year—have been plays which self-respecting men and women could see without apologizing for their presence in the theater. This is as true of pictures and of the artists of the screen. Think of Fairbanks, Pickford, Chaplin, Lloyd, Rogers, and other outstanding box-office attractions and say if money is an argument for filth on the screen. Compare the sales of the nasty periodicals offered on every news stand with the circulation of our really great magazines. Compare the prices received by those who write this obscene stuff with the earnings of those who appear in the decent class.

The same thing holds good in fiction. The so-called “daring” novel may hold first place for a month or two in the review columns of the daily papers. It may for a short while be the most talked-of book among those persons who imagine that to talk about such books lends a certain smartness to their conversation. But publishers will tell you that the novels which have sold year in and year out, which have been handed down from father to son and from mother to daughter until their titles are household words—those novels, the big money-makers, are clean.

Again, I do not wish to be misunderstood. I am not saying that decency is a mark of great literary strength. But, I insist, neither is indecency. I am only saying that

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given two novels of equal literary merit, the clean story will win every time.

Does my antipathy to unclean fiction lead me to stand for official censorship? Most emphatically it does not. My observation of political appointments in general does not warrant the belief that the case of art and letters can be bettered by legislative prohibitions. Bootleg liquor was bad enough. I am not for adding to our troubles bootleg books. The next logical step would be bootleg religion, and only Satan knows in what hell that would land us!

Censorship would merely force upon us the literary tastes of certain politically chosen persons who might or might not know what it was all about, and whose minds might be less acceptable on the whole than the objectionable mentalities of those authors whose books many of us should like to see condemned. Reform lobbies, hot advocates of pet prohibitions, devotees to "thou shalt not," believers in moral advancement by negation, and the law-madness of fanatics—all this, I hold, to be more damaging than the books of sex-mad writers and their unprincipled publishers who hope to make financial clean-ups from putrid publications.

I do not claim that mother, in giving me such a lasting distaste for dirty talk, added anything to my small intellectual abilities or to whatever talent for story-telling I may have been born with. But I do most emphatically insist that the incident set up within my being an abiding abhorrence for the vulgar and obscene which has colored

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my literary taste and which has been reflected in the books I have written.

More than half a century has not sufficed to erase the impression, too, that my dirty talk had hurt my mother. I knew, even then, that in some mysterious way she was suffering because of the words I had spoken. The taste of the rag and soap and ashes in my mouth was as nothing beside the shock of the realization in my childish soul that I had done something terrible to her. The humiliation I felt was overshadowed by the shame and horror of this effect of my words. And so I think that this first clear and definite memory of my mother is largely responsible for my mature conviction that if I were to write a story without regard for its effect upon the mental and spiritual health of my readers, I should be committing a crime for which our laws provide no adequate punishment. If I am wrong, some of our younger ineffectuals will not fail to correct me.

Before we left Whitesboro, even, I knew in a vague way that there was another world than my world of back yards and alleys and taverns, of the canal banks, the mill yard, the soap factory, and people whose mouths needed washing as mother had washed mine. There were many beautiful homes in the village. I could see from the outside that they were very different from the place where I lived. But I never got close enough to feel them; and unless you feel beauty, it is not real. It was as if those places, so different from the place where I belonged, were

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on another planet. I saw them somewhat as I saw the moon and stars. I felt dimly, too, that in some mysterious way mother knew about that other world. It was all very puzzling. But it did not really trouble me. I thought of it much as we older children think about the inhabitants of Mars. Then I came to know that other world, to see it from the inside and to feel it as something very real.

From Whitesboro, father moved us to the country a few miles from Auburn, New York. We lived in a ramshackle farm tenant house. Father worked between times that winter for the farmer—logging, chopping cord wood, splitting rails, putting up ice, trimming fruit trees, and what not. Brother and I went to school, through the deep snow in zero weather to a cobblestone schoolhouse on a hill, where the big boys made our small lives miserable.

We moved next to the country town of Sennett. The “healthy, pleasant and independent life of the farmer” seems now to have been definitely abandoned—at least by Lieutenant Will. The life of a small crossroads village carpenter, apparently, was much to be preferred. Also, the school and church were more convenient, not to mention the advantage of having a tavern so handy. Our tiny cottage, with its rotting porch floor and broken window-panes, its poverty smell, tumble-down fence, and weed-infested yard, was on the outskirts of the town and not far from the country home of an artist. He was a painter of animals. He was also a farmer and breeder of fine stock.

This artist-farmer and his motherly wife had lost their

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only child, a boy of my age, so it was not strange that they should notice the younger of the two lads who had come to live next door. They often said how much I reminded them of their own boy. They gave me a suit of clothes that had been his. And they caused a gate to be made in the fence at the lower end of the garden so that I could run over to see them as often as I would.

These gentle folk did not fail to include my parents and brother in their friendship. They were particularly kind—with, as I can see now, an understanding kindness—to mother. Mother and Will would sometimes go with me through the garden gate. But Will seems not to have felt the charm which was so alluring to me and which mother encouraged with such sympathetic interest. I remember my father scarcely at all during our sojourn in that little old house on the edge of Sennett. My memories are nearly all of that neighboring home. It was there that I first came to know how beautiful a home might be. It was there, too, that I first knew the magic of palette and brushes and colors.

That gate—my gate, they called it—opened for me, literally, into another world; that world of which I had had until then only a shadowy conception. The wide, well-kept lawn with great shade trees and graveled drive; the quiet dignity of the house; the wonderful barns and stables; the carefully tended garden; the fish pond where water lilies grew and great trout would come out of the deep shadows to feed from my hand; the flowers; the peacocks spreading their jeweled fans; the family of

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proud little bantams, and the white rabbits so tame they would come to meet me—it was not a fairyland; it was real. It was as real as my own world of back yards and alleys and taverns, of the old ramshackle farm tenant house and the tiny poverty-smelling cottage of a hand-to-mouth village carpenter. The wonder of it, the beauty of it, the feel of it, filled me with awe. That it was all mine to enjoy, that I was free to enter it whenever I wished, was hard to believe. That these gentle people who lived in this wondrously beautiful world actually wanted me to share it with them was difficult to understand.

Often my artist friend would come through the gate to ask mother if I might go with him for a walk over the farm. Sometimes he carried a fly rod and creel and we followed the brook from which the water in the garden trout pool came. And the brook led us through meadows of tall grass where larks and bobolinks sang; through pastures where gentle cattle grazed, and deep into the woods where squirrels and chipmunks played in the sunlight and shadow. At other times, our walks were ordered by the business of the farm. We visited the grain fields, inspected the sheep, looked over the calves, or directed the plowing or haying or harvesting.

Usually, on these occasions, I would be lifted to the broad back of a farm horse for a ride. And once my friend gave my name to a new-born colt which he expected would some day win a blue ribbon. At other times, my farmer-artist companion carried a sketch-book or color-box and, sitting on a folding stool, made pictures of the trees and fields and cattle while I lay on the grass and



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watched with breathless interest. And sometimes we took sandwiches with us and a bottle of milk for me, which I drank from a silver cup that was a part of the bottle.

Most thrilling of all these adventures in this new world of mine were my visits to my artist friend in his studio. While he worked I would sit perched on a high-backed chair, watching with all my soul, scarce daring to move or breathe lest I break the spell. It was magic, sure enough. A magic that was like the magic of the fields and meadows, the brook and woods, the sunshine and flowers and birds; only it was something more. Something which I felt but could not understand, as I felt but could not understand God.

I can see now that beautiful room: the carved table, the cabinet in which the artist kept his paints and brushes, the pictures on the walls, the easel with its canvas, and my friend sitting there with a huge palette of colors and a handful of brushes. Occasionally he would step back to study his work and I would wonder what he was thinking about it. Then, as he again approached the easel, he would cast a quick smiling glance at me, with perhaps a word or two of comradeship. Not infrequently he would gravely ask my opinion of the picture. Once he gave me paper and pencil and encouraged me to draw the head of a bull which looked out at me from the canvas on the easel.

I cannot pretend to say just how much these associations with my artist-farmer friend helped to guide me through the years that came later, but I do know that through all my life the memory of those days has lived

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in me, vivid and real. And I feel very sure that in the heart of the young boy, the artist planted seeds of beauty and gentleness which did not wholly fail to bear fruit.

Make no mistake, my sons: beauty and kindness and gentle living are potent forces in a world which is so often ugly and cold and cruel. To understand, in one's heart, that "life is more than meat" is to master one of the secrets of successful living. The difficult part of this philosophy is to know what life really is. I shall not attempt to tell you. You must find the answer for yourselves. I shall only say that, after sixty years of trying, I have concluded that whatever it is, life is inside, but that it is vitally related to things outside. Whether it develops from the outside in, or from the inside out, I cannot say.

I shall tell you later how these experiences with this gentle artist friend of my childhood were repeated with another painter at a most critical period in my young manhood, so that my feet were set again in the way from which I had strayed. The first opened a gate for my brief boyhood visit to his world. The second opened the door of my understanding appreciation and gave me the assurance that, if I would, I too might enter and make that world my own.

With these memories it is not strange that the greatest desire of my life has been that, with all my mistakes and failures, I might still be permitted to help you, my sons, a little to the knowledge and the joy of the greatest of all the arts—the art of beautiful living.

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#### IV

ONE OF THE MOST CRITICAL STAGES OF A BOY'S DEVELOPMENT, I think, is when he is learning really to know his parents. You boys may not agree to this, because your children, Gilbert, have not yet reached that period; and you, Norman, are not yet far enough in years away from it. To a young father every day is a critical period. To a university junior there is no such thing. But I know that the impressions which I received at this becoming-acquainted period of my boyhood have proved most potent in shaping my life.

Up to this time I had accepted father and mother blindly, without question or understanding. I had wondered and wanted to know about almost everything else in the universe, from the moon and stars to the insides of a clock, but I had never thought of inquiring into the personalities of my parents. They were not consciously, to me, separate and distinct individualities. They were parts of me, as my two hands were parts of my body. I accepted them as I accepted my arms and legs. Then gradually I began to feel myself detached from them. It was as if my arms or my legs had developed minds and personalities apart from the rest of me. I began to ask myself ques-

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tions about them. I began to ask them about themselves and each other. Most important of all, I began, within myself, to speculate as to what they thought—why they did the things they did, and about their attitude toward me. I began, also, to observe and to think about the various phases of life with which I was in contact, and to experience definite reactions to my environment.

We had moved from the little old cottage on the outskirts of the village to another house. It was a larger but not a better one. But there was a barn, an apple orchard, a garden with several kinds of fruit, berries and grapes, and a generous yard with trees. On the whole, it was much the best home we boys had known.

Oh yes, it was a little nearer the tavern, too. From the front gate we need only walk a hundred yards or so down the hill, cross the creek, and go on another few hundred yards, and there we were. No matter where we wished to go in the village, we must come to the tavern first. If we went to the grocery store, to the post-office, to church or to school, there stood the tavern. It was as if the institution were determined to occupy the foremost place in our lives.

It appears, too, that with this move we entered upon an era of better things. We acquired a cow, a pig and chickens, and, later on, a horse. Jack was a poor old rack of bones, but still he was a horse. My brother and I were old enough to work in the garden, now, and to take care of the live stock, which included milking, and teaching the calf to drink; also we chopped wood and theoretically

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kept the kitchen wood-box filled. In summer we drove the cow to and from the pasture. We began to earn a little money, too, driving our neighbor's cows to and from the pasture, and doing all sorts of odd jobs here and there. We went to school and church and Sunday school (Presbyterian, this time), and again, for a short while, father sang in the choir. I pumped the organ.

But the gate which my artist-farmer friend had opened for me into that other world was closed. I have no more memories of him or of his beautiful home. My impression is that he, too, moved away. At any rate, he went out of my life as he had come into it, and for many years to come there was for me no way by which I could enter again into that world which he had made known to me. But though that gate was closed, I knew now that there was another world. And that was a great thing for me to know. Years later I came to understand how my consciousness of that other world was kept alive at this time by my mother. Perhaps the greatest thing my artist-farmer friend did for me was this: In admitting me to that world in which he lived he made it possible for me to know my mother as I could never have known her without his help.

I could tell you many things of this period of my boyhood when we lived in that old house on the hill. I could easily make a book of these boyhood adventures and experiences alone. But why should I bother to write about things which every normal boy knows for himself? There were winters and summers, school and vacation times. There were schoolmates, ball teams, Indian tribes, and

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pirate crew. There were sleigh rides and fishing and nutting and berrying. There was an old swimming-hole. There were parties, and picnics and Fourth of Julys and birthdays and Thanksgivings and Christmases. There were expeditions, explorations, and adventures. There was a circus. All that belongs normally to a boy of from seven or eight to twelve was mine. And there was another baby, your Uncle George. But with this host of memories that, as I write, come crowding into my mind, those which transcend all others in importance are the memories of my companionship with mother.

I must tell you, too, that I never did know my father very well. Beginning with this period, it seems that we grew farther and farther apart, until between us a great gulf became fixed—a gulf which neither of us was ever strong enough to cross.

Nothing in all my experiences during the years of which I am writing to you, my sons, caused me so much suffering as this separation from my father—a separation which was all the more in evidence when we were together. I feel deep in my heart that the same was true of him. The humiliation, the pain, the steady trend through the years toward the utter hopelessness of this lack of companionship or understanding between us marred my life beyond repair. Nothing has ever made up to me this loss. The separation from my mother by her death has had compensating memories. But for this separation from my father, while he lived, there has been no

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compensation. I do not know why this has been so. I solemnly assure you that I am very far from wishing to place all the blame on him. God alone can know what forces, what instincts and inherited traits of character, what passions and appetites acquired by habits born of associations and circumstances—God alone, I say, knows the “why” of human acts, the origin of human impulses, or the secret conflicts which try the souls of men beyond their mortal strength.

I doubt if you boys can realize how gladly I would omit from these pages any reference to this mistake which has cost me so much and from which I think he suffered perhaps even more than I. But I cannot hold true to my purpose in writing a book about myself for you without touching upon this thing which has run through all my years like a painful and unhealing hurt. Indeed, I think perhaps it is because I myself have so sadly missed this privilege of companionship and understanding with my own father that I feel so deeply the need to tell you about yours.

It was in this becoming-acquainted period that I first realized the true nature of those spells which so frequently overtook my father and which made him talk and act at times so differently from his normal manner.

The day it happened he was not working, and for some reason unknown to me had gone to the city of Auburn. It was just dusk. I was on an errand to the grocery store when I met him coming along the path between the creek

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at the foot of our hill and the tavern. He stopped suddenly, lurched against the fence, and, steadying himself, said in a thick, maudlin tone, with many a manly oath, that he had forgotten to bring anything from the city for the baby.

I was paralyzed with horror. I could neither speak nor move, until, asserting loudly that he could never go home without taking something to the baby, he turned and staggered away toward the tavern and the village. Then I ran, ran as if all the fiends of hell were after me, never stopping until I was in mother's arms. When she had calmed me so that I could speak, I sobbed: "Father is drunk. I saw him."

Mother did not speak. She just sat there in a sort of stony silence and held me close. And then, presently, understanding came. I came to feel that this, too, was something which mother and I must share.

The subject was never again mentioned between us. We accepted it without discussion and, so far as we could, ignored it. Whether or not she ever mentioned the incident to father I do not know.

I relate the incident here because, from that time until mother's death, this too was a bond which held us very close together. And because to that comradeship with my mother I owe my escape in later years from a life which would otherwise have mastered me. To that companionship of sympathy and understanding, I am indebted, too, for whatever measure of right thinking and living I have



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attained, and for that element in my work which has made my life, perhaps, not wholly a failure.

Our improved circumstances, meaning the larger house with the orchard and garden and the live stock, added nothing to mother's comfort or leisure. The heavy load she carried upon her delicate shoulders was not in the least lightened by this spurt of seeming prosperity; rather, was it increased. In addition to the cooking and scrubbing and laundering, there was now the milk to be cared for, with pails and pans to be kept clean, and butter-making. May Heaven forgive me—how I did hate that churn! There were quantities of fruit to be put up, too, which saved us from having to charge so many purchases at the village grocery. Always the baby needed attention. Always there was clothing to be made for herself and us boys, to say nothing of the endless mending and darning. And there were quilts to make for cold winter nights, and mittens and stockings and scarfs to knit for cold winter days. And there were endless quantities of rags to sew for carpets, the weaving to be paid for from the sale of eggs and milk. For her there were no electric lights to snap on and off at a touch of her finger; there were coal-oil lamps that needed filling and cleaning every blessed day. There was no electric stove, no electric flatiron, no vacuum cleaner, no washing-machine, no electric sewing-machine, no labor-saving devices of any kind. She had no help.

How, with all the drudgery that enslaved her, and slowly but surely sapped the life of her body, she man-

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aged to minister to the inner life of her sons, is one of God's mysteries to me. Bare as it was, with the nakedness of a poverty which permitted only the sheer material necessities of life, that home was never without some touch of beauty. It might be nothing more than a few house plants, a flower, a spray of apple blossoms, a branch of autumn leaves, a slip of pussy willow, a fern or a sheaf of wild grasses, but it was always there.

She taught me, before I knew books, to wonder at the beauty of a snowflake, to marvel at the patterns of frost on the windowpanes, and to note the delicate traceries of ice forming in a tub or bucket of water. Through her eyes, I saw the exquisite green of opening leaves and buds and watched the unfolding of blossoms. With her, I felt the breathless beauty of the sunset sky, delighted in the cloud forms, and was awed at the majesty of the storms and the mystery of the moon and stars. Through her eyes, I saw the true glory of the humble dandelion and buttercup and daisy. With her, I looked for the first robins, listened to the music of bobolink and lark, traced the flight of the swallow and shared the happiness of mating birds from their first choice of a building-site to the day when the fledglings timidly ventured from the nest.

Her household duties dragged her from her bed long before her boys were awake and kept her at work hours after she had kissed her sons good night, but I never knew her when she was too busy to share our childish interest, to receive with adequate expressions of delight

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the treasures we brought to her or to offer suggestions for enchanting adventures in our little world of make-believe.

The first book I remember, except for hazy recollections of primers and such, was Longfellow's "Song of Hiawatha." The volume had belonged to mother when she was a girl. She gave it to me, and read it with me, taught me to love it, and encouraged me to commit much of it to memory. Of course I lived much of the old legend in play with my brother and our mates. And in this, too, mother helped—fashioning Indian head-dresses of chicken feathers, making fringed leggings and moccasins, contriving quivers for arrows, finding strings for bows.

It belongs in this book, too, that mother did not permit the impressions made upon me by our artist-farmer friend, with his brushes and colors, to fade. I continued to draw that famous bull's head whenever I found a pencil in my fingers and a scrap of paper handy. I do it sometimes even yet, in moments of absent-mindedness—while waiting for a telephone number, say.

From that single head, I created a mighty herd of cattle. I suspect that the original was himself the head of a good family. I added, to this bovine population, horses and dogs and swine and deer and fowls without number. Not forgetting my old friends, the peacocks and the bantams. My holdings in live stock continued to increase, until mother, seeing how it was with me, set about teaching me to draw seriously from simple natural objects. My first model, under her instruction was a calla lily—plant, pot, and all. I drew houses and barns, tables and

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chairs, the pump, the grindstone, the wagon, the fence and gates, bridges, anything and everything. And so I arrived at the dignity of my own studio.

This studio was a little room up under the roof. The floor was bare. There was no furniture except the box I used for a chair and the easel I made. And surely I need not tell you that mother managed somehow to find a box of colors and brushes for me.

I do not remember that my work aroused the world to any show of enthusiasm. But one admirer never failed me. The understanding which my little artist soul craved I had from her, full measure. Many a time as I sat alone in my studio toiling over a picture, so absorbed that I was quite literally lost to the world about me, I would suddenly feel her looking over my shoulder. She had left her washtub or scrubbing or cooking or baby-tending to creep up those bare, steep old stairs, and assure her boy of her abiding interest. Nor did she fail to offer much needed criticisms. But critics like her have a way of passing judgment without inflicting pain, which you will allow is a most gracious gift for any critical-minded person to possess.

I remember one early morning when it was my turn to go to the pasture for the cow. The earth was drenched with dew. Every leaf and blade was ornamented with beads of crystal. Spider webs, which were always of interest to me, were so hung with gems of liquid silver that they seemed unearthly in their beauty. The ground was cold to my bare feet and when I had aroused the cow

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and started her toward the pasture gate I stood for a minute or two on the warm dry spot where she had been lying. Then, as I followed after the animal, I chanced to see at the foot of a little knoll a bunch of everlasting flowers. To take those flowers home to mother was as natural for me as to eat the breakfast she would have ready when I returned to the house.

Several years (it seemed to me ages) later, when I was a young man living in a city many miles from that home of my boyhood, I received by chance an old pasteboard box which contained some trinkets that mother had treasured as mothers do—her wedding gloves, a locket with a curl of hair, a baby's shoe, and other such valuables. And there I found again that little bunch of everlasting flowers.

I shall tell you later how that tiny knot of dried flowers awakened in me anew emotions which literally forced me to take a step that changed the whole trend of my life and set me in those currents which ultimately led to my life work.

If I have sometimes overburdened my writing with attempts to paint in words the beauties and the wonders of nature; if I have weakened my work with sunsets and flowers and trees and meadows and pastures; if, in short, I have tried to put into my stories the feel of the out-of-doors rather than the feel of the city, you know, now, the reason. It is not, as you shall see, because I have not known the life of cities. It is because in those days of my early boyhood I saw so much through her eyes.

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I know, now, with whatever measure of wisdom the years have given me, that I would not exchange this inheritance which mother left me for all the material wealth of kingdoms. I have the feeling too that, with that spiritual insight given to such natures, she knew the value of this, the only treasure which in her poverty she could bequeath to her sons.

It was at this period, too, that I made the acquaintance of Auntie Sue, my father's sister, who taught school and who was such an enthusiastic student of the Wright genealogy. Auntie Sue was mother's closest friend. From her we always had *The Youth's Companion* for a Christmas present. She always managed to spend a part of her vacation with us. Next to mother, she is the brightest star in my boyhood sky. She was so much a part of those best years, and was so richly associated with my memories of mother, that I count it a great and good fortune to have had her so close to me for the last twenty years of her life. You boys know what a rare and beautiful soul she was.

There are fussy, critical persons who have said that my letter to Auntie Sue in "The Re-Creation of Brian Kent" is the worst sort of sentimental slop. Well, perhaps it is. Perhaps Auntie Sue, whose literary culture far exceeded mine, felt that way about it, too. But if she did, the dear old lady's heart so outweighed her critical judgment that she never permitted me to guess what she really thought of the matter.

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As for that, if I were dragged into court and forced to answer to the charge of being a confirmed sentimentalist, I could only plead guilty. But I should most earnestly petition His Honor to give me a light sentence upon the grounds of extenuating circumstances. I really cannot help it. I was born that way.

Many times I have wondered why the world did not succeed in kicking the heart clean out of me long before I ever thought of writing books. Many times during these later years have I been betrayed into expensive and, to me, disastrous ventures by clever individuals who played upon my foolish flare for sentiment. And after each soul-racking experience, as I looked upon the ruins of what I had thought was friendship, I have solemnly sworn that from then on I would be hard-boiled. But always, to my continuing sorrow, I have found that what the world could not accomplish with cruel hardship I could not do by resolution. And so I stand today, guilty in the sight of God and man of feeling life too deeply and of putting into my books too much of what I feel.

It is not that I fail to see the virtue of intelligence. I do. I glory in the candle power of our amazing intellectual lights. Believe me, I do. But when I sit down to a job of writing, however sternly I resolve to use whatever brains God, in His mercy, has given me, I always end by writing sentimentally. I plan with the sobriety of a mathematician, and then proceed to execute with the drunken recklessness of a confirmed toper. I begin with the resolution that I will analyze my characters with the impas-

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sive, unemotional mind of a medical student dissecting a cadaver. And then presently it happens. My cadaver comes to life (I mean for me; it may remain dead enough for my readers) and I am whooping and cavorting all over the premises in a wild endeavor to make my luckless readers feel as I think my characters feel about whatever is happening to them at that particular moment. I remind myself of that foolish individual who, homeward bound at three A.M., staggered into a fellow citizen.

"What's the matter with you?" cried indignant fellow citizen. "Can't you see where you're going?"

"Hic! 'S all right, brother," the afflicted one returned gravely. "Shee where I'm goin' a'right. Trouble is, hic, can't go where I'm sheein'."

The artist who mixed his color with brains was a great artist. Probably the real reason why I do not use that vehicle in my word-painting is because the supply is so limited. Perhaps if I had brains enough I should not be trying, after all these years, to write fiction at all. I am not sure as to that. But of one thing I am sure: With all the literary crimes chargeable to me, no one can justly say that I think too highly of myself as a writer. A reasonable degree of self-respect, yes; and that which follows—an honest respect for my work. But for me it is written, "Thou shalt not kid thyself." And so, as the years draw on, I have come to accept myself simply as God and my mother made me. In the same spirit of resignation I have learned to accept my work and to make my offering to my day and generation. The fact that my offering is a



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turtledove instead of a lusty ram, I complacently charge to circumstances over which I have had no control.

The members of our church were treating their pastor to a donation party. I suppose I must explain to you boys, who have not enjoyed my educational advantages, that a donation party for the parson is an occasion when the members of the flock conspire to deluge their spiritual leader with every conceivable form of material offering—from cakes and pies to baby-clothes, from a peck of potatoes to a ton of coal, from cabbages to knitted socks. It was no small feature of the ceremony that the worshipers descended in a body on the fortunate clergyman and his household and to the accompaniment of hymns and prayers, to say nothing of gossip and laughter, consumed most of the offerings. They did not, of course, consume the ton of coal or the knitted socks, but oh, those cakes and pies!

For some reason mother did not attend this more or less Christian function. But, not wishing to appear too peculiar, I suppose, she sent brother Will and me to the parsonage the next morning with a sack of buckwheat flour.

The good man received our belated gift with appropriate expressions of thanksgiving. His good wife fed us with remnants of the feast. Brother Will went off somewhere about his own affairs. I returned home, a sadly puzzled youngster. There was something about the whole business which I could not understand. Going straight to mother, I demanded, "Why don't we have carpets on our

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floors and pictures on our walls and nice furniture and a piano, like the minister has in his house?"

I had of course seen carpets and pictures and nice furniture in the home of my artist-farmer friend. But I had accepted it all as belonging to that wonder world in which he lived. It had no more made me conscious of the bareness of my own home than the story of golden streets made me conscious of the dirt road I traveled to and from the cow pasture. I had never been sent to that home of my artist-farmer friend with a gift of food. Such a thing would never have entered my childish mind. But this donation party! It may have been that buckwheat flour and the thought of pancakes that would never be mine which turned the trick. It may have been those remnants of the feast which the minister's wife gave us to eat. Whatever it was that caused it, this incident first drove home to me the reality of our poverty. For the first time I was conscious of the bareness of my home. For the first time I felt the sting, the hurt of being poor.

I submit to you, my sons, that it is not the pinch of physical needs so much as it is the spiritual pinch of poverty that hurts. It is not so much what one lacks as it is what others in abundance possess which drives one to desperate ends. Want and hardship on a desert island, in company with others who were suffering like ills would be bearable. It might, in these times of underworld rule, unemployment, and ever increasing taxes, be enjoyable. But to be hungry in the presence of food going to waste; to freeze in the night outside a warm, brilliantly lighted

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restaurant; to tramp the streets friendless and sick for the barest necessities of life; to see through the windows of the houses well-clothed, jewel-bedecked fellow creatures feasting and making merry—these are the experiences that put hell into one's heart. It is the feeling that poverty is so unfair and unnecessary. It is the puzzling question: Why should anyone starve when the land is burdened with plenty? It is the consciousness of want that is awakened by contrast with abundance which arouses the very devil in one's soul. Believe me, my sons, I know.

We hear a lot about the advantages of youthful poverty in the development of character. Mostly we hear about it from persons who have never experienced it and so cannot know what they talk about. No one has ever been able to convince me that had my boyhood home been less wretched I should have had less of that companionship with mother which has been so potent an influence in my life. She gave me all she had. Can I believe that had she been able to give me more she would not have done so?

If one expects to raise a healthy, vigorous animal, one gives it proper food and care. Husky souls are not developed on starvation spiritual rations. Half-starved, undernourished spirits and bodies never realize the fullness of their natural possibilities. If one whose childhood was passed in an environment of pinching poverty attains to a degree of success, it is not because of the poverty but in spite of it. And where one succeeds, hundreds of thousands fail. As well expect a plant to grow and bear fruit in impoverished soil.

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Great wealth, with its accompanying luxuries, has without doubt proved a fatal handicap to many who were born with natural abilities for usefulness. But the other extreme, I am persuaded, is fully as harmful. If riches encourage the growth of certain varieties of weeds, poverty as certainly is most favorable to others. Between these two destroying extremes lies decent independence, reasonable leisure from a deadly material grind, wholesome self-respect, and nourishing food for body and soul. Had I had such a boyhood home with the educational opportunities which would have been a part of it, I should not now be so far below that level of culture which I have seen but have never been able to reach. The taste of a prince with the purse of a pauper does not make for contentment. An appreciation of finished scholarship with the mental training of a hod-carrier does not put peace into one's soul.

Through all my life the poverty of those early years has stalked beside me, a dreadful fear. When you boys were small and my physical condition, after pneumonia, prevented me from securing even the life-insurance my meager income would otherwise have provided, I was beset with worry. Many night hours when I should have been sleeping I lay staring into the darkness, my heart and soul sick with fear for the future of my little family. Such nights are poor preparation for the days that follow them. Mental machinery out of order from nagging fear does not operate smoothly and efficiently at its maximum power.

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Even now, when you, my sons, are young men well equipped to meet life on your own and I have made modest provision against old age, I am not free from this specter. No amount of reasoning with myself can lay this ghost of my early life. No assurance of the safety of those dear to me can persuade me to be at peace. And I know that this fear, this habit of worry, has taken from me a heavy toll of strength which would otherwise have gone into my work. I do not mean the fear of being poor. Nothing like it. I mean the fear of that poverty which denies childhood the very materials out of which strong bodies, healthy minds, and vigorous souls are built. I mean that poverty which condemns self-respecting and decently proud men and women to a pinched and humiliating dependence in their old age. I mean the sort of poverty which killed my mother and made her death a blessed relief to her.

I realize, now, how that childhood fellowship with my mother was forced upon us largely by the stark circumstances under which we lived. She saw, I am sure, that it was the only possible salvation for her sons. I like to think that it was her salvation also. How often have I wished that with those advantages which the generosity of the reading public has enabled me to bestow upon you, my sons, I might give you, also, a little of this wealth which my mother gave to me!

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V

MOTHER'S ILLNESS BEGAN, SO FAR AS I KNEW ANY-thing about it, one wash day. I was in the kitchen with her when it happened. I was eleven years old. At that time nothing could have been farther from my thoughts than her death.

To do the laundry work for a household of five, which included two active boys and an eighteen-months-old baby was not a light task for any woman. In addition to all the other housework and without mechanical aids, running water, or plumbing, it was too much for the physical strength of a delicate little woman, who, as I have said, weighed not much more than a hundred pounds.

My brother Will and I were required to do certain chores about the house in order to lighten her work. We were supposed to cut the stove wood and keep the box in the kitchen filled. We were expected to pump and carry water, to empty the tubs and in numerous other small ways to help. But boys of that age are seldom thoughtful in such matters. They cannot realize the need for the small services they are asked to render. Their minds are so crowded with their own boyish interests that it is easy for them to forget. In such a home the hard-

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working mother is accepted as a matter of course. That she should toil from dawn until dark for her children and their father is natural. We had never known anything else. A servant in our house would have been as strange to us as a vacuum cleaner, a Frigidaire, an electric stove, or a bathroom.

I wish I could say that we did all we could to make mother's work easier for her. But we did not. We shirked and quarreled over our duties and evaded our youthful responsibilities upon every possible pretext. Nor did the whippings administered by father with a strap or a horse-whip make us, for long, more mindful of our duties. Punishment, too, was expected as a matter of course. It was included in the normal course of events. Something more than a horsewhip or a strap in the hands of an angry father was required to bring me to a realization of mother's need.

Mother was bending over the tub, rubbing vigorously on the washboard. The room was filled with noisome steam from the soiled clothing and soapsuds that were boiling in the wash boiler on the stove. She had been suffering from a hard cold for some time and coughed a great deal, but no one thought anything of *that*. The family washing must be done. Suddenly, as she worked, a spasm of coughing seized her. I saw her straighten up and press her hand to her side as if in pain. Then a queer look came over her face. She snatched a handkerchief from her apron pocket and put it to her mouth. When she removed the handkerchief it was splotted with red. She

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looked at it curiously, I thought, then seeing that I had noticed she gave me a cheery smile and went into her bedroom. That smile made everything all right to me. Handkerchiefs red from nose-bleedings were too common in my experience for the incident to alarm me in the least.

She finished that washing some time later. I helped her hang the clothes on the line. Will and I carried out the tubs of dirty water. She mopped the floor. She cooked the supper. While Will and I did the dishes that evening, quarreling over the division of the work as usual, father and mother talked together in low earnest tones. I did not know what they were being so serious about, and I did not in any way connect their hushed conversation with that bloody handkerchief. Why should I?

The next day a doctor came. I thought it strange, because mother was doing her housework as usual. She cheerfully assured me that everything was all right; it was just her cold.

A few days later, father and mother drove to a distant town to see another doctor. They were gone all day. A neighbor woman came in to mind the baby. It was an event. For some time after that the laundry was sent out.

The winter came. Still there was no one except her two irresponsible boys to help with the housework and the sewing and the baby.

Then came the time when mother did not leave her bed and except for the help of the neighbor during school hours brother and I did the housework, even to the cooking.



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Then suddenly *I knew*.

It was late in the day. I had gone to the village store for coal oil because we had neglected to fill the lamps that morning and the gallon oil can was empty. I was returning home. It was almost dark. I had crossed the creek on the single plank that served for a footbridge and was following the path up the little rise of ground toward the house. Half-way up the hill I stopped as suddenly as if someone had halted me with a shout. And in that moment I knew that my mother was going to die.

The possibility of mother's death had never before occurred to me. Nor was my thought at that moment the thought that she *might* die. The revelation (I know no other word for it) was clear and positive and final. I say I *knew* that she was going to die—that she would never leave her bed again. I had a feeling that something was telling me, that something was speaking, as it were, deep within myself. I do not mean that I heard a voice; nothing like it. There was no sound which came to me from the outside; there were no words. I cannot explain it better than to say simply that I *knew*.

Strangely enough, too, I was not at all frightened. I had no feeling of panic. I was not in the least excited. I made no outward demonstration of emotion. I felt curiously strong and cool and confident and I knew exactly what I must do. I must quit school and keep house and take care of mother until the end. Beyond the end, it was all blank. I did not even give it a thought. I went calmly on up the hill to the house.

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Mother's bed had been moved into the living-room (we called it the sitting-room) next to the kitchen, so that she could still watch over her household and direct our bungling efforts. I put the oil can down in the kitchen and went straight to the doorway between the two rooms where I stood for some time, silently looking at her. And then I was aware that she, too, knew.

"You had better fill the lamps, son," she said. "It is growing dark."

I filled and lighted the lamps and set about getting supper.

Not until many years later did I ever speak to a living soul of this experience. I knew at the time that I must not speak of it then. I knew that this knowledge was given to me for myself alone. It was something that belonged to me in a very special way, and I must not share it with anyone.

I am well aware of the comments that are likely to be made by some who will read this account of my boyhood experience. But I cannot help what anyone may think or say. It happened exactly as I have related it.

For me, the explanation of the experience lies in the spiritual harmony existing between my mother and myself.

And this harmony of our inner beings, this sympathy or oneness, was, I think, engendered by the peculiar stress under which mother was living during that period before my birth, of which I have already written. Just as I believe that she, because of her spiritual and emotional ex-

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perience at that time endowed me, her unborn son, with certain spiritual characteristics and emotional capacities, so, I think, was I drawn into oneness with her. As the string of a violin, if keyed to a certain pitch, will vibrate in unison with a note sounded upon another instrument, so I, before my birth, was keyed to my mother's spiritual nature. The knowledge of mother's approaching death that came to me so suddenly and so definitely that evening was, I believe, a message from her in the sense that the communication which the violin string receives from its companion instrument is a message.

Consider the circumstances. She was alone in the house, lying helpless upon that bed of her desperate illness from which she was never to rise. In the stillness and the loneliness of that hour, as the dusk of evening deepened, she was contemplating her approaching death. She was thinking of her sons, of the evils that menaced them, of their desperate need of her, and that she must soon leave them to face those evils without her help. She had come to the end of the hard road which she had so painfully and bravely followed since her girlhood. That girlhood, after all, was not so many years away. She was wondering how much her sons understood and if they realized that they were soon to lose her. How could they know as she knew? How could they vision as she visioned what they must face without her? If only she might in some way help them to understand! If only she might in some way prepare them! And while she was thus agonizing in her mother love and in her desperate helplessness, the spirit

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of the son that was so closely tuned to hers responded. As the violin string answers to its companion instrument, so the boy's inner being vibrated, if you like, in unison with the spirit of his mother, and the boy knew.

I may as well add that this is not the only experience of this nature which I have known. As you shall hear, there have been other times when it was given me to *know* within myself, as clearly and definitely as if a voice spoke in actual words, what I must do. And looking back upon those occasions, I have seen that, without exception, they were the turning points, the deciding moments, the directing impulses that sent me forward on the road I have followed. And these experiences, too, I believe, were in like manner and as definitely messages from her; messages sent and received under the identical law of our inner beings that operated to inform me of our approaching physical separation. A separation which, after all, was only an incident in our lives and not at all that final parting which we commonly think of as death.

I have written of these experiences, my sons, because I cannot tell you honestly what I think you should know about your father without including them and my understanding of them. You must think what you will about it. I can only say again, the things I tell you in this book are true; I may or may not be right in my understanding of them.

I was permitted to stop going to school and, from that time until the end, I was mother's housekeeper, cook, and

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nurse, to say nothing of minding the baby. Brother Will was required to do all the outside, the man's, work. And, if you please, to keep the kitchen wood-box filled for me!

As soon as breakfast was over, father would leave, with his dinner pail, for his work. At half-past eight Will would leave for school. From then until about five, when Will returned from school, except for the brief visits from kindly neighbors who stole time from their own household duties to look in on us, the day belonged to mother and me.

I would not have you think that those days were dark and sad, with an overshadowing gloom of the inevitable end mother and I knew was approaching. It was not so. They were, in a way, the happiest days I have ever known. I do not mean that we were gay with fun and laughter. But gayety and laughter do not always indicate real happiness. They are more often born of thoughtlessness and indifference; or they are thin disguises under which stark unhappiness endeavors to hide. Our happiness did not find expression in shallow ripples upon the surface; it was rather in the still deeps of us. While we never spoke of that which we both knew, we did not pretend or attempt to hide it from each other. There was no need to put our knowledge into words. For us there was nothing to hide.

I think it was the companionship of these last weeks of her earthly life which made my consciousness of mother such an influence all during those difficult after years. For me, it became gloriously true that she was not dead in the

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sense that she had gone out of my life. In a most literal sense, for me, my mother continued to live. So real was her influence that many times I have seemed to feel her actual presence.

It is a wonderful thing to know that a soul while on earth may so project itself into the future of a loved one that it actually continues a living presence long years after the flesh which held it has returned to the earth from which all flesh comes and to which all flesh must return. This truth, alone, would force me to a firm belief in immortality. If it were not for this conception of immortality, for me, life itself would have no meaning.

I cannot fail to record here, too, the many beautiful kindnesses we received at this time from our neighbors. The nearest of these, and the one who came most often and never without bringing some dainty of her own cooking for the invalid, was Mrs. Grandy.

Jim Grandy and his wife were natives of Ireland and spoke the real brogue of their homeland. Jim was by profession a hedger and ditcher; and I think it must have been Mother Grandy who first gave Irish hearts their fame. With their three children, Jimmy, Ann, and Mary, they lived up the road a little way in a tiny unpainted house. My brother and I were as much at home in the Grandy cottage as we were in our own home. Little Jimmy was our inseparable chum. Mother Grandy treated us as if we were of her own brood. Between this warm-hearted Irishwoman and my mother a beautiful friendship had developed. And now, as the end drew near, there

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was never a day that she did not look in two or three times. And many a night she watched beside my mother's bed.

For the last few days Aunt Mate, the wife of father's brother George, came. I think that she, better than anyone else, understood how it was with mother and me. She was with us until it was all over. I like to think of these things now, because of what followed so soon after.

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## VI

WITHIN A DAY OR TWO AFTER THE FUNERAL, ALMA'S boys were separated, to grow up strangers to one another, and Lieutenant Will went away to live his own life, unhindered by family cares.

The baby, your Uncle George, was given to father's sister Mary, who lived in Ohio. Brother Will was sent to a farmer in another part of the country. I was put to work for a small farmer and vegetable-grower who lived on the edge of the village less than a mile from what had been my home. If only I might have been sent away from that place of my comradeship with mother, it would have been easier. New scenes and new people would have excited an interest which might have lessened the shock. But to live with strangers, amid the very scenes of my boyhood memories, only emphasized with cruel force, my loneliness. It seems to me now unnecessarily brutal.

This small farmer, to whom I was delivered as if I were an unwanted puppy being turned over to a new master, was one of Sennett's leading citizens. In politics, in society, and in the church he stood high. I knew him, of course. That is, I knew him as lowly folk are privileged to know the great—from a distance and with a



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proper feeling of awe. Sennett was only a small country village, but we were all graded as carefully as if the cross-roads hamlet with its one tavern and one grocery store were a teeming metropolis.

Nor is there a doubt in my mind that the gentleman merited the esteem in which he was held. He was sober, industrious, discreet, and respectable; a credit and an ornament to any community, small or large. To say that no friendship was involved in the transaction by which he acquired me, is neither a criticism nor a complaint. It is a calm, unimpassioned statement of fact, with no intentional reflections on the parties to the deal. That wide gulf which seems to be eternally fixed between one of his standing and the "carpenter Wrights" of this world forbade any such consideration. He took me, I say, exactly as he would have taken a puppy from some one who had no use for the little beast—except, perhaps, that he would have taken the dog because he wanted it, while he took me because he saw a chance to make something out of me; something for himself, I mean. He was to give me in return for what he could make out of me exactly what he would have expected to give a puppy—something to eat and a place to sleep. His wife (the couple had no children of their own) looked upon me as a somewhat disagreeable thing to be endured because it was useful to her husband in his business.

I very soon had cause to know my master as the most profane and foul-mouthed creature I had ever come in contact with. The twelve-year-old boy who was so wholly

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in his power was a convenient object upon which he could exercise his natural talents without fear of consequences. All that he publicly withheld in the interest of respectability he privately disgorged upon me. He rarely, if ever, spoke to me without a curse. To make me the butt of an obscene or cruel joke delighted him.

My duties were absurdly simple. I was roughly routed out of bed between three and four o'clock in the morning. Before the sun was up we would be on our way to Auburn with a wagon load of vegetables. In the afternoon I worked in the field, helping to gather another load for the following morning. Usually it was dark when we finished. The evening chores were done by lantern light. After that, I was free to crawl upstairs to my bed in the attic. When it was not the season for peddling vegetables, I worked with a hoe in the fields, side by side with my master and two other men, and was expected to keep pace with them.

At other times, from sunup to sundown, I gathered potato bugs, sweeping the filthy things from the plants into a pan, or treating them to a dose of Paris green which I mixed in a tub of water and applied to the vines with a heavy sprinkling can. In the fall, the potatoes were harvested by digging them up with forks. It was my job to pick them up and carry them, a bushel basket full at a time, to the wagon. The basket must be full, because I was required to tally each basket on the side of the wagon with a piece of chalk. My master and two other men forked the potatoes from the ground, working

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side by side, each following a row. If, because the crop was unusually heavy and my twelve-year-old strength was not equal to the task, I failed to keep up with the diggers, I was roundly cursed.

The conversation of these men initiated me into every variety of obscene talk, story, and jest known. Because, like my mother, I was lightly built, with small bones and not overfleshed, I was ridiculed from dawn until dark. My freckles, my skinny arms and spindling legs, were sources of never ending amusement. When I could not make the trip from the diggers to the wagon without putting the heavy basket down, their witty comments and advice helped to brighten their day.

When Sunday came I was taken to church, whereby my master and mistress, I am sure, acquired in the sight of the brethren much merit for their Christian charity in giving that Wright boy such a good home. On Sunday afternoons I was free to amuse myself. I usually spent the time in an ancient graveyard back of the barn. No one ever visited this deserted place of the dead, and for me it was a safe retreat. One Sunday afternoon I ran away, back to that old house on the hill which had been my home. The place was unoccupied—the house empty, the doors locked. It was almost dark when I climbed the friendly apple tree whose branches overhung the woodshed. From the roof of the shed I could jump to the roof of the kitchen porch and so clamber through a window into what had been my studio. They found me there in the morning and took me back.

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I hope I am not boring you boys with all this. I must tell you about it, you see, because it is really an important part of what is termed "my early training" and so has had a marked influence in determining the general character of my books.

My education progressed in the manner I have related, until winter put an end to work in the fields. Then for a while I went to the village school and worked only nights and mornings and Saturdays at whatever they could find for me to do. But the hours I spent in school profited my good master nothing and he was not at all happy over the situation. He explained it all to me frequently, with admirable frankness and more than adequate emphasis. Nor did he neglect to tell me about my father, toward whom he was not, under the circumstances, feeling too kindly. I did not know even where my father was living. I knew only, in a hazy way, that he made his headquarters with the people who had taken my brother Will. I never knew who made the arrangements which delivered me into the hands of another farmer who lived three miles from town.

It was late in the afternoon of the day before Christmas when I received my orders to march, and, with my worldly possessions in a small valise, set out on foot for my new home. It was zero weather. The snow was deep, the sleigh track slippery. I was not sure that I knew the place.

When I finally reached the big house which stood at

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the edge of a deep wood, it was dark. The house seemed so huge, so lonely and mysterious, that I was afraid. At last I mustered up sufficient courage to knock at the front door. I dared not go around to the kitchen, which was so close to the dark woods.

The farmer and his wife were surprised to see me. They said they had not expected me until after Christmas and they were just starting out to celebrate Christmas Eve with a gathering of their relatives some miles away. They would return sometime before morning. In the excitement of their departure for the festivities they forgot to ask if I had had my supper. Nor did they think to indicate where I was to sleep. They delayed their going only long enough to show me the woodshed so that I might keep up a good fire in the living-room and have the house nice and warm for their return from their long, cold ride. Almost before I realized what was happening the sound of the sleigh bells died away in the night and I was alone in that great empty house, dark save for the one lamp and the firelight in the room where they left me.

God! how frightened I was! I scarcely dared to move or look around. Sounds of ghostly footsteps. Creaking boards on the stairs and over my head. Low moaning . . . *thump . . . thud . . . scrape . . . rattle!* What was going on behind those closed doors which led to mysterious other rooms? What was upstairs? What was in the cellar? What was outside? What was in the dark woods that I had seen in the dusk, so close to the house? Every tale of horror I had ever heard was re-acted in my terror-stricken

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mind. My imagination conjured up a hundred ghastly horrors. I felt baleful eyes peering at me through the windows. Something evil was listening at those closed doors. Once in every hundred years I would force myself to go, lamp in hand, through the dark kitchen to the woodshed for another armful of wood.

It was past three o'clock Christmas morning when the good man of the house and his wife returned. They brought me, from their family Christmas tree, a gay little stocking-shaped bag of popcorn and candy.

My new place was a much larger farm than the one which had initiated me into the gentle art of "working out." But save for a three-months-old baby, my new master and mistress had no children. A regular hired man would have cost thirteen dollars a month. So the farmer and I did all the work. There were cattle and sheep and hogs and horses to be fed and watered. There were five cows to be milked and calves to be taught to drink from a bucket. There were stables to be cleaned, horses to be groomed, wood to be cut, and a variety of other tasks to be performed every day. We were up in the morning and began work by lantern light. We finished at night by the light of the same lanterns. Between times I went to school, walking to and from the village through the snow, carrying my lunch in a tin pail. Saturday was not exactly a holiday. Every Sunday I went with the farmer, his wife, and their baby to Sunday school and church, for this man was an exceedingly Godly man, a deacon.

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There was never a meal in that house at which he failed to ask a fervent blessing upon the food, upon those who sat at his table, upon the pastor and the brethren, the church, the nation, the President, the foreign missionaries, and everything else he could think of to have blessed, both for here and the hereafter. No profane word ever passed his lips. So careful was he not to offend, that he never even used the word "bull" when referring to that most respectable farm animal, but always said "gentleman cow." It is true, too, that this genteel expression was always accompanied with a meaning smirk and an apologetic snicker which left no doubt in anyone's mind as to why he did not employ the shorter term.

When it was time for the spring plowing my school days ended. It was my job to follow the plow with a four-horse harrow. I was not tall enough to harness the horses and it was the law that every man who drove a team must feed, water, groom, harness, and unharness the animals entrusted to him. I managed by standing on a box which I kept in the stable. All day I walked up and down the freshly plowed side hills. The four horses were gentle and easily handled, but they nearly jerked my skinny arms from my thin shoulders and made my heels crack as I hung on to the lines on the sometimes steep downhill turns.

There was a large apple orchard on this farm and every year the good deacon would put away many barrels of cider which Dame Nature would kindly turn into vinegar for us to peddle in Auburn when the spring planting was

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over. Nor did Nature stop with turning cider into vinegar. Assisted by the deacon, she obligingly turned rain water into vinegar also. Old vinegar barrels supplied with a proper quantity of "mother" were filled with water from the cistern (we strained the wigglers out) and placed in the sun. In due time—lo! a miracle! The water had become vinegar. And no housewife could by the look or taste of it distinguish that rain-water vinegar from the genuine cider-made article. Very carefully, and at length, my good master explained to me that it *was* pure cider vinegar, because nothing but those old cider vinegar barrels and the "mother" would make rain water act like that.

As we drove through the streets of the city he would make me call loudly: "Apples? . . . Apples! . . . Vinegar! . . . Vinegar—Pure Cider Vinegar!" And when a housewife answered my pleading hail, it was I who always assured her of the purity of the article. When he had me properly trained, I peddled vinegar alone. That this sour rain water would not make pickles was a fact which I was instructed it would be better to let our customers discover for themselves.

I cannot say that I reaped a bountiful spiritual harvest from those table blessings, the pious admonitions, and my forced attendance at Sunday school and church. Perhaps I gathered more than I know. But I am quite certain that I received, at this period of my boyhood, decided impressions as to spiritual values. I have never since been able to believe that God is over fond of these too ready peti-



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tioners. A gift for praying in public may be a surface indication of great spiritual treasure, but, as any old prospector will tell you, good surface indications do not always evidence ore in paying quantities.

On the whole, these good farmer folk were not unkind. Probably it was good for me to be disciplined, without curses, under the yoke of hard labor. It was a bit hard on my thin back and scrawny limbs, perhaps, but it toughened without breaking my spirit, which no doubt was left a little soft by my being, as I most certainly was, a mother's boy.

That summer brought many days of rare delight. I was given the job of tending sheep. Early in the morning, while the ground was still wet with dew, I would lead the flock forth from their yard to a section of the farm which was part pasture and part woodland and was not properly fenced to keep small stock from the adjoining fields of corn and wheat and oats. With only the companionship of my woolly charges I would spend the day, wandering along the grassy banks of a little creek, lying on my back to look at the cloud pictures, dreaming half asleep in the shade, watching the wild things in the edge of the woods or peopling the forest depths with creatures of my imagination—Indians, fairies, gnomes, and dragons.

Then a letter came from mother's aunt Mary who, as I have told you, raised mother from babyhood until her marriage with Lieutenant Will. The letter was an invitation to visit Grandma Smith, as we boys had been taught to call her, in her home at Wright Settlement. I think

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the dear old lady must have written my father, too, because he came to see me and arranged for me to go. I did not know it at the time, but I was not to return to Sennett until many years later.

I shall not dwell upon my life with Grandma Smith in the home where my mother spent the happy years of her girlhood. After my experience in "working out," it was heaven. I attended the little country school near the old Wright homestead where I was born. Other members of the family, my father's cousins, were still living in the settlement and I came to know the young people who were my people.

Then Grandma Smith was taken seriously ill and I was hurried off in midwinter to my father's brother, Uncle George, and Aunt Mate, and their two girls, who lived in the country near Utica. For the remaining winter months I went to another country school. Uncle George was a cheese-maker and when summer came I worked for him in the factory. I hope that my summer work repaid him in some measure for my winter board, but I never could return the full measure of the love they gave me. It was Aunt Mate, you know, who was with me when mother died. In her I found, for a short time, another mother, who made no distinction between Alma's boy and her own children.

Father was now living in Lima, Ohio, and with the high wages and abundance of work in that boom oil town was well able to provide for his sons. I think that some

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pressure was brought to bear upon him by the family; at any rate, it was arranged that Brother Will and I should go to live with father's sister, Mary Morrison, who "took boarders" in Milan, Ohio. Aunt Mary already had our baby brother, George, so we three boys would be together in a good home and would attend school as we should. My father was to pay for our board. The Morrisons were not able financially to shoulder the burden of feeding and clothing three growing boys. The burden of being responsible for their bringing up was, God knows, quite enough.

But the plan failed for the same old reason. Father had other uses for his earnings. It was not long until Will was sent back to the farmer who had taken him after mother's death. Father sent for me to join him in Lima. My school days, such broken scraps of school days they had been, were over.

I did not see Aunt Mary again until years later. She was long past keeping boarders, and it was my privilege to pay that many years overdue board bill with a pension which cared for her the remaining years of her life.

The city was all very strange and terrifying to my country soul. The thought that I must stay there, that I could not escape, was appalling. We lived in a cheap boarding-house. I worked at anything that could be found for me to do. Then father found a regular job for me in a paint shop. I sandpapered the running gears of wagons and carriages. I did not earn enough to pay for my board,

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but father easily remedied that by going away and leaving me to work out the problem with the landlady as best I could.

The situation forced me to look for work with better pay. I found it in a handle factory. Technically, I was "off bearer" on the "D" machine, which means that I loaded the waste wood from the saw on a wheelbarrow and wheeled it out to the yard and stacked it. The "D" sawyer worked by the piece. The more handles he roughed out, the more money he made, and the more waste wood for me. I was not paid by the piece. I was very proud of my sawyer, because he was the fastest worker in the factory. But with my pride went many a fall. I was too light for so heavy a job and often, struggle as I would with the last atom of my strength, the wheelbarrow load would upset. To right the capsized barrow and reload the cargo caused delay. The sawyer sawed merrily on. I would return with the empty barrow to find the space, which I was supposed to keep clear piled shoulder high with waste wood and growing higher every second. Most of my noon hours were spent trying to reduce that pile to proportions which would at least permit me to see the sawyer. And at night I always remained after the sawyer had finished, to clean up for a fresh start the next morning.

The workmen in that factory were all very kind to me. But they could not help. Then one Saturday night, after all the others were gone, the superintendent talked to me in his office. Very gently he told me that he knew how

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hard I was trying to do my work, but that I was not strong enough for the job. He said that I must not feel he was discharging me. He wanted me to stay until I could find other work. But for my own good, I should find something else to do as soon as I could. A few days later this kindly man, himself, found a job for me, driving the delivery wagon for a small grocery store.

But the pay for this work which was within the limits of my physical strength was not equal to that everlasting board bill. I solved the problem this time by renting a room and boarding myself. I cooked on a tiny gasoline stove without an oven. It was at this time that I learned to hate prunes and the smell of gasoline.

Save for my employers and our customers, I knew no one. I had no friend of my own age. Every Sunday I cooked the best dinner I could manage, cleaned house, and washed my clothes. Everyone treated me with the greatest kindness. Once in a while father would appear and disappear again in the same casual fashion. I was not unhappy on the whole. For the first time in my life I was a free and independent soul. I had escaped unpaid board bills. I was not living on my relatives. I was my own master. I could look the world in the face! and, believe me, I did! That seat on the delivery wagon, close to the tail of the old gray horse, was my throne. I envied no man. I did not look toward the future, I looked at the past, since mother's death, with the thrill of one who had escaped. I had no ambitions of any sort. I suppose

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that was because I could imagine nothing better, this being so much better than anything I had so far known.

Years later I was invited to a Thanksgiving dinner at a home in a Midwestern city. The table talk developed that my host and his family had at one time lived in South Lima. Turning to my hostess, I asked: "Do you remember the grocer with whom you traded?"

"Oh, yes," she answered. Then she laughed. "This Thanksgiving dinner makes me think of the boy who drove the delivery wagon. I had ordered ducks for our Thanksgiving dinner and when the boy appeared with the other things, my ducks were missing. They insisted at the store that the ducks had been sent with the rest of the order. The boy thought he remembered putting them in the wagon. Some days later we learned that they had been found in the street. I shall never forget that poor delivery boy's embarrassment over my lost Thanksgiving dinner."

"I know exactly how he felt," said I, "for I was that delivery boy who lost your ducks."

It was Old Man Winter who brought my delivery boy experience to an end. The cold rains and sleet and snow, with threats of near-zero weather to come, were, to put it mildly, disturbing. I had no overcoat, no winter underwear, no gloves, and my shoes were wearing very thin.

My employers, who could not fail to see my predicament, managed somehow to get in touch with father. Lieutenant Will took his problem to an old G.A.R. comrade who kept a book and stationery store. Result: I

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went to work for "Old Comrade." Salary? I could sleep on a thin cot in the back room of the store and I could eat at "Comrade's" home after he and his family had finished their meals.

"Comrade" was a gentle soul, industrious, economical, and subdued. The wife and mother was one of those high-spirited ladies who never by any chance commit the error of permitting their inferiors to think too well of themselves. The oldest daughter worked in the store. She was a kindly, competent young woman who should have had a home and babies of her own. So far as she dared to be, she was my friend. The other girl was in school. She was not allowed to talk with me or in any way to reveal the shameful fact that she knew I was on earth. The boy, also in school, was my age. He, too, was most carefully guarded against the evils which might befall him if he should come in contact with me. Nor did this watchful mother ever hesitate to rebuke any member of her family whom she caught exhibiting signs of interest in me. That she always rebuked them in my presence made her remarks the more effective in correcting the behavior of her offspring and in properly subduing the spirit of my mother's son.

I was up at six in the morning to open the store, sweep out, and make ready for the day. When "Comrade" arrived on the scene of action I went up to the house, about a mile, for my breakfast. The breakfast things were always being cleared away when I arrived, so it was up to me to salvage what I could. Having had her breakfast,

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the lady of the house was invariably in good form and she never hesitated to make the most of the opportunity. While I tried to eat she would tell me again what was wrong with my father, and many, many things wherein I fell short of her specifications. For the other two meals, the same catch-as-catch-can rules applied. Often she dropped in at the store to spend an afternoon or evening just to brighten up my day. When they all went home at ten or eleven o'clock, I locked up for the night. And then, oh *then*, I had my innings!

Books, books, books—shelves and more shelves of books! I read everything, from Nick Carter and the *Police Gazette* to Shakespeare. Sunday I read all day. I could not go out, because I had no winter clothing. The soles of my shoes and my stockings were worn clean through so that a large spot on the bottom of each foot made uncomfortable contact with icy pavements. But, praises be, the uppers held so that I managed to make my underpinning appear fairly respectable if one did not look too closely.

I really must tell you, too, that this mother's efforts to keep her son uncontaminated by contact with me and to instill in him a proper attitude toward his inferiors was most fittingly rewarded. The last I heard of him he was behind the counter selling my books in the same store where I had slept in the back room. I sincerely trust that this contact with me in these later years did him no harm and that the profits they have made from the sale of my novels has



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repaid them for those hours of reading which I stole when they thought their store was safely locked for the night.

And this leads me to remark that, while I was ever a book boy, I have never been a book man. While I have been for over a quarter of a century a professional writer of books, my lack of literary knowledge is appalling. When I am in the company of bookish persons I am ashamed and ill at ease. In a literary atmosphere I am filled with dismay. References to literature or literary history depress me with a painful sense of my ignorance of things which as an author I am properly supposed to know.

My boyhood reading was so haphazard, so unguided, so unattended by proper schooling that it was ninety per cent worthless. Much of it was worse than worthless; it was definitely harmful. It fixed in me habits of reading which gave me a crooked literary spine; exactly as my boyhood years of too heavy physical labor affected my undeveloped body and resulted in injuries I have never wholly outgrown. Wise horsemen do not subject colts to the work harness or the race track before their young bones and muscles have had time for free and untrammelled growth. I had no free and untrammelled growth in either my physical or mental development. It would have been better had I never been permitted to read at all until my mind was ready. Driven to solitude by lack of friends and deprived of the healthful pleasures of youthful companionship, I burdened by mind and imagination with a

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conglomeration of ill-assorted and indigestible food much of which was actually poisonous.

If it be argued that I have had abundant opportunity in later years to overcome these errors of youth, I must answer that I have not found myself equal to the task. I began my career as a writer too late. My reading habits were fixed. The strength of my youth and the years of early manhood were spent in a hand-to-hand struggle with life, not in laying a foundation in literature upon which to build my future. I was chiefly concerned with bread and butter. Reading, for me, was only an escape. I did not read to get somewhere; I read to get away from something. You boys have seen a silly cow break from her pasture into a field of corn or alfalfa. You know how the animal invariably behaved. Instead of industriously making the most of her rich opportunity to lay in a good supply of food, she snatched a mouthful here, rushed away to another spot to snatch another bite, and hurried on to gulp another mouthful, all the while watching from the tail of her eye for someone to appear and drive her back to where she belonged. The very abundance and richness of the food so excited her that she was unable to satisfy her hunger after having gone to the trouble of breaking through the fence. Well, in the field of literature, I am that cow. They should have rigged me with a yoke to keep me from crawling through the fence when I was a calf.

All this explains why I have drawn upon life rather than literature for the materials out of which I have made

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my stories. Indeed, as you shall learn, I wrote my first novel with no idea of ever becoming a professional author. In fact, I had no thought of even offering it to a publisher. But I shall tell you about that later. It is enough to say here that I was forced into authorship by life, by a combination of circumstances over which I had no control. I came to my work, not by way of the graded highways of literature but by the rough trails and rutted roads of desperate living.

This, too, is true: while I have often been shamed by my ignorance of literature, I have never sought to hide under a cloak of pretense. From the disaster of utter humiliation I have saved myself by taking refuge in self-respect. I do not feel that the lack of literary background is necessarily disgraceful. But I do feel deeply that an author who pretends to a culture which he has not, is not only a charlatan, he is also an unmitigated ass.

I know that you boys, in common with everyone else who has had more than a speaking acquaintance with me, have been disturbed by my habit of sometimes withdrawing into myself. If anyone but myself were writing this, they would probably put it that I was sullen or sulky; that I was grouchy. If more charitably inclined, they might say that I was subject to attacks of the blues. But you boys have been more kind than some, for you have never by word or sign shown the slightest hint of impatience with me on these miserable occasions. Indeed, you have in quiet ways, often made me feel your sympathy, so that my heart has been filled with gratitude of

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which until now I have never been able to force myself to speak.

No one can know how desperately I have fought against these spells of depression. I have reasoned with myself. I have willed against them. I have soundly cursed myself for being such a gloom. I have been sick at heart with shame to see those I loved made so unhappy by my unreasonable and wretched behavior. My only consolation is the poor consolation of knowing that no matter how unhappy I make others, no one can possibly suffer as I suffer within myself. At these times I am the loneliest soul on earth. I am beset with the feeling that I am not wanted, that I am only tolerated. I want only to be alone. I feel myself literally forced to withdraw wretchedly into myself. And these spells are all the more annoying to everyone concerned because they come apparently without a shadow of reason.

I have never sought to explain or excuse my conduct, because it seems so unreasonable—most of all to me. I am not attempting to excuse it now, but I think the explanation lies in those years immediately following mother's death. For that reason, I have told you of this period of my boyhood.

Following those years of companionship with mother (except for my brief visits to Grandma Smith, Uncle George, and Aunt Mary) I had no companionship with anyone. For one reason or another I was merely tolerated. The attitude of most of those with whom I came in contact only emphasized my loneliness. I was shifted from

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place to place, not because I was wanted anywhere but because for one reason or another someone desired or was forced to get rid of me. That the reasons for getting rid of me were good and imperative reasons, did not alter the effect upon me. Even my father made me feel that I was something he wished to God had never happened. I was forced to retreat within myself. For me there was nothing else to do. The habit of loneliness, of withdrawing within myself, like so many habits formed at that age, became fixed. I have never acquired the spiritual or mental strength to overcome it.

As I have told you, I received from my mother an impression which resulted in a lifelong antipathy toward obscene talk. Later, from my companionship with her, I formed habits of reacting to the beauties of nature, and of interest in beautiful things, which have been as enduring. From her, too, I received spiritual impulses I have never outgrown. It is not unreasonable, then, I think, that those years of not being wanted and of being forced by loneliness to live within myself should have made impressions as indelible. "As the twig is bent," you know. The hard part of that law is that these twigs of humanity are so easily bent in so many different directions at the same time.

From that day in early winter when I started to work in the bookstore until spring I had not one cent of money. As soon as father had provided me with that place to eat and sleep and read, he went away to Findlay, Ohio, an-

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other boom city. When spring came he suddenly wrote for me to join him.

"Comrade" slipped me five dollars when "*she*" was not looking. I purchased a pair of shoes and with what remained of my fortune journeyed to the neighboring city. Father's letter was not an invitation; it was an order which I must obey blindly. I did not know what lay ahead.

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## VII

WHEN I ARRIVED AT FINDLAY I FOUND THAT MY father and four of his bosom cronies had hit upon the great idea of coöperative living. They had rented the second floor of a building in a part of the city where they felt very much at home. The lower floor was a saloon. Every other house in the neighborhood, I think, was what we called in those days a "sporting house." Remembering my experience as a housekeeper during those last months of mother's illness, father had sent for me to cook and do the general housework for this select bachelors' club. Except for my father, the members of this coöperative experiment were "rig-builders" in the near-by natural-gas fields. They were all big, husky fellows as quick to fight as they were ready for a drunken carousal or a bout of gambling. They made "big money" for those days, and save for the little they gave me to purchase groceries they spent their earnings in the neighborhood as fast as they received their pay checks.

There were no more books for me now. The literature of the Club was mainly the *Police Gazette*. There may have been a public library, but nobody told me about it. The ladies of the neighborhood ran in and out of the

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house with a charming lack of ceremony, as good neighbors should. Except for these friends of my household, the only woman with whom I enjoyed even a speaking acquaintance was a poor, hideous old hunchback who cooked in one of the "sporting houses." The place where she worked was right next door, so close that we could call to each other from our kitchens.

This creature of the underworld soon proved herself more than a mere acquaintance. She became a friend in need. She could curse with the most amazing fluency and vigor, and with the courage of her convictions cared not a straw at whom she aimed her volleys. But in that ugly deformed body was a heart as big as her profane vocabulary was extensive. Often she brought me a loaf of her own home-made bread—stolen, of course, from her employers. And always she charged me that I "say nothin' to nobody" but eat every damn bit of it myself. To hear her lay out those husky rig-builders in my defense was food for my hungry soul.

More than this: out of her wide experience and well-developed power of observation, she told me many things that were necessary for me to know. With authority I could not question and with a choice of words which would have been impossible to any one who lacked her training she revealed the inside hell of that life in the midst of which I was placed—dark horrors that did not appear on the glittering surface and which filled my young soul with loathing. Often she talked to me about my mother and led me to draw upon my store of memories,



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until it seemed that I could feel mother very near. I am sure that mother must have been very grateful to this woman who watched over me as if I were her own son.

It was a strange combination of influences. An ugly deformed dwarf—a lowly servant in a house of prostitution—and my mother, who made her presence felt in my memories.

It is not pleasant to write to you, my sons, of this period of my growing-up years. But I must, because I know now that this hunchbacked cook was one of the saving influences in my life. The truths I taught you boys as soon as you were old enough to receive them, I had first from her. At this time, when I was caught in one of the currents of life that leads to disease and death as surely as water runs downhill, this strange friend was sent to me.

I have often reflected that if those novelists who delight to draw the materials for their stories from such sources as this life in the midst of which I was thrown would, in their pretended strivings for realism, paint their pictures with the colors used by my hunchbacked teacher, there might possibly be an excuse for their pens. But they do not. For a very good reason, they do not. Wretched souls, sick with vice and haunted by the ghosts of what might have been, must be jazzed up with drink and feverish excitement if they are to profit by their state. Bodies foul with disease must be made attractive with jewels and paint and dressed with finery, if they would lure customers to their trade. Realism—stark, ungilded

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realism of the school where I was taught would not pay in fiction. So these stories and plays and pictures which mask as serious studies of this phase of life must be tricked out, jazzed up, dressed in garments of art, made attractive—or to publish them would not pay.

One may feel pity and even friendliness for the poor slaves of lust, for with very few exceptions they are creatures of circumstances, even as you and I. For certain citizens of the underworld of crime, one may even feel a touch of admiration—I mean for the mere strength of their genius. Nor am I lacking in a fellow feeling for those who foot the bills in these places. Even in those days of my schooling in realism I could understand the call which was answered so readily by my rig-builders. The roof of my own house is too transparent for me to toss a rock in any direction. It is not because I know so little but because I know so much of the real life of this underworld that I say: Those who in story, play, or picture make vice fascinating and present thugs and murderers in heroic guise for the worship of children too young to detect the lie—they are the real social enemies of our day.

Believe me, that hunchbaack friend of my youth was a realist with the bark on. I would that certain of my contemporaries might have sat under her teaching when they were “growing up.” I do not envy any writer literary honors gained by making soul-and-body destroying vice attractive to young girls, or by inspiring hero-worship of criminals in the hearts of boys. I have infinitely more respect for the old hunchbacked cook in that house of prosti-

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tution who presented to me the stark and hideous reality of these things in language as vivid and forceful as it was unfit to print.

Following this cooking and housekeeping job, I became a subscription agent for a certain magazine. With samples of this most worthy periodical I canvassed the countryside for customers. I did not meet with startling success, but I came in contact with an amazing variety of homes and people.

From this respectable, if lowly, position of itinerant representative of culture at a yearly rate, I was promoted by circumstances to become a peddler of furniture polish. It was good furniture polish. I know, because I made it myself. The profits were more generous than in the magazine subscription business. You see, I could give a visible demonstration of the furniture polish, while the cultural . . . ah . . . polish, in which I formerly dealt, could not be so convincingly presented.

With my bottles of polish and my rags with which I demonstrated, I roamed about the country, from village to village, finding in this occupation not only a livelihood, more or less, but a degree of pleasing freedom. I was my own master. I could go where my fancy led. I enjoyed the open road. The long walks from farmhouse to farmhouse between villages gave me abundant opportunity for reveries. I delighted in the beauties of nature and in the clean atmosphere of wayside fields and orchards and woodlands. I was interested in continually meeting an endless

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variety of people. Then one day, I know not why nor how, came one of those mysterious experiences which pushed me out of that current and gave my life a different trend.

It was mid-afternoon. Since early morning I had been selling, or trying to sell, at the farmhouses along a road which was leading me to a certain country village. At a sharp turn of the road I came in sight of the little town which lay a quarter of a mile away, with a railroad crossing immediately before me. Encouraged by the success of my morning efforts, I was looking forward to a good business in the village. Suddenly something checked me. I stood stock-still on the crossing. I did not hear a voice; it was rather an impression. I felt that I was not alone. I sensed a presence as definitely as I should have been aware of the company of a living being. I knew as clearly as if someone were actually speaking to me, what I must do.

I turned and started down that railroad track toward the city where I still made my headquarters, as fast as I could walk. The feeling that I was escaping from something was so real that I almost ran. It was exactly as if I had been headed toward some danger and had been warned in the nick of time. I was possessed, too, by an overpowering conviction that there was something better in the world for me than my present occupation and that I was forever through with peddling furniture polish. I had no idea as to what I should do next to earn my bread and butter. I was not concerned with what I was to do. I

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knew only that I must not continue in the direction I was going.

I know, as I write it down, just how foolish all this sounds. But that is exactly the way it happened; and looking back now, I know that the moment was one of the decisive moments of my life.

I shall not bother to relate how I managed next to keep soul and body together. I was a carpenter's helper, a janitor, a roustabout in a boiler works, did all sorts of odd jobs, worked in a glass factory, and by hook or crook lived, if such existence can be called living. I had no plans for my future, no particular ambitions. My whole interest was how to get enough to eat. Then it happened again that I saw clearly what I must do.

I had fallen in with a gang of young hoodlums who infested an unsavory section of the city. There were not many vices possible to youth in which they were not experienced. To exist without labor was their aim. To work was to lose caste. We made our headquarters in a shanty hidden in a jungle-like growth of willows on the bank of the river near the mouth of the city sewer. Food, tobacco, and other supplies were secured by begging from door to door or by stealing, whichever was more convenient. My particular pal, through whose influence I had been received into the fraternity, was called "Pegleg" or "Peg" for short. He had lost a leg hopping a freight. Certainly the future of my mother's son did not at this particular period look very promising. Later, three members of our

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band were sentenced to prison for stealing, but that was after I had ceased to run with the pack. It was the incident which ended my association with these young outlaws which concerns us in this book.

Peg and I were loafing on the bank of the river one day, considering ways and means and indulging in philosophical observations of life. Presently, I said with proper emphasis: "Well, I know what I'm going to do."

Peg eyed me with speculative interest as if something in my voice or manner indicated a scheme of unusual promise.

"What?"

"I'm going to learn a trade."

My companion solemnly emptied his face of a prodigious amount of tobacco juice. "The hell you are!"

"I mean it, Peg."

"What you gonna do that for?"

Continuing the vein of our philosophical discussion of ways and means, I answered: "Because the fellow who's got a trade makes the most money when he works, and can find a job easier when he wants one."

"Huh! What trade you gonna learn?"

"Painting."

"Painting?"

"Yeah. A painter gets good money. He don't have to spend any for tools. It ain't hard work. He can go where he likes without lugging a lot of tools around. He ain't tied down in no particular place. He can get a job anywhere."

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Of course I knew about painters from my work in that shop in Lima, sandpapering running gears. The particular feature of this incident which leads me to tell you about it was this: Up to that moment the thought of learning a trade had not entered my head, nor had anyone told me that I should. I suddenly knew, deep down inside of myself, that it was the thing I *must* do. I knew it exactly as if someone had spoken the words. Exactly as I had known that my mother was going to die. Exactly as I had so suddenly known that I must not continue selling furniture polish.

More than this: when I made my positive declaration that I was going to learn a trade, I had no particular trade in mind. I seemed to be speaking words that were given me to speak at that moment. When Peg asked what trade, I answered without an instant's hesitation or thought, as if I were repeating definite spoken orders. The rest of the conversation followed as the flame follows the striking of a match, and the fire of resolution so suddenly and unexpectedly kindled blazed up until so far as I was concerned the next step in my career was definitely settled. I seemed to be acting under clear and positive direction. There was nothing for me to do but to obey. And with that incident my connection with the gang ended as effectually as if I had dropped dead.

I saw Peg occasionally during the next few years and he always regarded me with a curious half-wondering, half-cynical expression. He could never understand

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what had happened to me. For that matter, there seems to be no good reason, so far as reason goes, why I should not have continued in the way I was headed until my finger-prints were of interest in police circles.

It may be said that I am by nature impulsive and more or less erratic, that I often act without premeditation or deliberate consideration, and that is true. But I do not think this native characteristic accounts for all there was in the incident. I do not think my natural impulsiveness explains that strange feeling of another presence and a sense of *knowing* as exactly what I must do as if a voice had actually spoken. And the fact remains, that this occasion, too, marked a definite turn in the road which was to lead me eventually to my life work.

The following day I offered myself to a firm of painters and decorators as an apprentice. I was accepted. While learning the trade I was to receive two dollars and fifty cents a week.

I must now have a regular place to board or to keep house as in my delivery-wagon days. I hunted up my old hunchback friend. She was living with her man, a poor half-witted fellow, in a miserable tenement house in that quarter of the city where we had first become acquainted. Her man worked at something within the limits of his mental capacity in a brick yard and she took his wages, allowing him only tobacco and beer money. She could manage to board me for two dollars a week. This left me fifty cents a week with which to buy clothing and enjoy life.



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With a regular job and a regular boarding place I modestly felt that I was growing up.

I had many and various experiences as a cub painter. Many of them I look back to now with amused interest. Some I recall with a very real pleasure. Not a few were so discreditable that I am glad I need not put them in this book.

My hunchback friend and her man had a terrible fight. Each of the belligerents appealed to me with confidential statements of the difficulty. I diplomatically sympathized with each and held impartially that they were both wrong. They both remained my friends. But as she had stolen his earnings and sold him out, and he had beaten her nearly to death, my boarding place was smashed beyond repair. Father was in and out of my life in his characteristic, irresponsible way. For months at a time I would not see him. Again, for a while, we would be together, living in squalid quarters in the worst section of the city, existing from hand to mouth, God only knows how.

I was still an apprentice, but had reached a stage in my training when I would soon rank as a journeyman painter, when an incident occurred which I think you will agree I should relate.

I had started my apprenticeship putting nail holes and sandpapering for a crew of house painters. I suppose it was because I showed some natural ability for another branch of their business that my employers used me more and more on their jobs of decorating and frescoing. We

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did churches, theaters, banks, saloons, and all sorts of other interiors.

It happened that a new and most palatial saloon was being fitted up, quite the most pretentious and costly establishment of its kind in the city. The work was in the hands of a Toledo firm and they had sent one of their own men to do the decorating. But when this decorator needed a helper, they applied to the local firm for which I worked. My employers delegated me to the job.

My new boss and I, being the only painters, worked together. It was summer and we worked leisurely, because for that sort of work it is not good to be too hurried. Also, we were never without a pail of cold beer within easy reach on the scaffold. We were putting the finishing touches to the ornate ceiling and as we plied our brushes or rested from our labor we talked of many things. One afternoon my companion asked if I had read a certain book.

I had, thanks to that winter in the bookstore. From our mutual interest in this particular book we slipped easily into general book talk. You know how such talks go: "Have you read this? Have you read that?" Comparing likes and dislikes, telling bits of a story, reciting perhaps bits of poetry—you know.

The conversation had continued to some length when my boss passed the "bucket of suds" to me with the remark: "You're a damned fool. You have no business on this scaffold."

I started up in alarm and looked to see what idiotic

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blunder had caused his outburst. "What's the matter?" I asked. "What have I done now?"

"There's nothing wrong with your work," he returned. "It's *you*. You ought not to be working like this. You should be in school."

Since the last of my boyhood school days in Milan, I had never thought of going to school. I had accepted the fact that my school days were over and so had dismissed the matter from my mind. No one had ever suggested to me such a thing as my going to school. The idea advanced by this painter was so impossible, so preposterous, that I was amused and laughed at what I took to be a joke. Whereupon he proceeded to talk to me in a vein which quickly checked my merriment and, I am persuaded, was good for my soul. At any rate, this idea which was first planted in my mind by a half-drunken fresco painter while we were decorating the ceiling of a saloon was later to bear fruit. But of course at the time I could not know *that*.

It was about this time, too, that I saw a play which made an impression upon me, so deep and lasting that to a large degree it shaped my future and determined the character of my life work. Certainly, more than anything that had happened to me since mother's death, it turned my mind into channels of thought which eventually led me out of the environment in which I was living and counteracted influences which otherwise would have proved destructive.

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I had not been inside a church, to attend services, since my boyhood in Milan. I had been growing toward manhood quite out of touch with Christian people. I had known no sort of spiritual influence except for portions of my stolen reading in that bookstore. I had been subjected to few influences which did not tend to debase. To you, my sons, acquainted as you are with my philosophy of life and with the thought of our Paul's devotion to the art of the theater, it will be significant that my first vital conception of good and evil as definite life forces should have come to me from a play.

I had read "Faust" by the night light in that bookstore. And now when the opportunity came to see the play I could not resist the temptation to spend the price of a seat in the gallery. It was Lewis Morrison's presentation of Mephistopheles. I was as one in a trance. I was not in a theater, watching a play being acted upon the stage. I was looking upon life, my life. I was not conscious of Mr. Morrison acting a part; I was seeing the personification of evil. I was witnessing the eternal clash of spiritual forces which in every soul makes for ultimate salvation or final destruction. It was to me a tremendous spiritual experience that shook my very being.

I left the theater to see the environment in which I was living and to view the influences to which I was being subjected in a new light. I had been accepting as a matter of course the only life I knew. I was becoming habituated to my surroundings. My vision was dimmed by familiarity. I saw life now in the light of the eternal truth which

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Goethe's genius visioned and the art of Lewis Morrison made real. I do not in the least exaggerate, but state the simple fact as I know it after all the years have passed, when I say that this experience remained one of the most powerful influences in my life.

Is it strange, then, that I should look upon the theater with something of the feeling that one looks upon a temple, and that I should resent certain types of plays as one would resent an obscene dance performed before the altar in a cathedral?

But you must not conclude from this frank confession of my extravagant feeling toward the theater that I would have only religious plays presented. Far from it. And I am as far from wanting plays with a moral attached—or purpose plays or problem plays. Beauty in its every manifestation, whether in speech, in music or in bodily movements—beauty, I say, is in itself its own law and reason for being. Rightly accepted, it is in itself an expression of divinity. It needs no interpretation, no explanation, no justification. It no more calls for a moral than a tropical sunset calls for analysis. It no more needs to carry a sermon than the blue expanse of the ocean, the mighty uplift of a snow-capped mountain range or the loveliness of a violet needs to proclaim a preachment.

But I would uncompromisingly close the doors of these "temples of art" against plays which present evil in the garments of beauty, which exhibit obscenities with the sparkle of witticisms, parade low vulgarities and suggestive lewdness in the guise of melody, and shriek to high

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heaven the unspeakable lie that human beings are essentially lower than beasts and that life is a filthy mess. I would have our theaters temples of beauty. The beauty of truth which is inherent in the deepest tragedies and which is the soul of comedy. The beauty of thought beautifully expressed, of emotion beautifully felt, of color and form and movement. Beauty, for its own sake, not degraded to serve the ends of propagandist or preacher, not debased to the purposes of those who offer wretchedness and ugliness and common, everyday nastiness in the guise of entertainment.

I know, even as I write this, just how impossible and idealistic it all sounds. But then, you know, I *am* an impossible idealist and so it is quite all right for me to say it, and I shall let it stand. While it is natural that I should feel as I do, I do not expect others to feel that way. I long ago ceased to expect my poor little thoughts to make the tiniest dent in the armor of our stalwart knights of the box office. But that, my sons, is life—filled with impossibilities.

To write a play that should be beautiful in its inner truth, and beautiful in its outward presentation of that truth, has for many years been my most ambitious and impossible dream. Then when our Paul elected to dedicate his life to the art of the theater I felt that in this son's career I should have the joy which has been denied me through my own work. We know how high *he* aimed, and we know that no finer soul ever gave itself to any art. But that dream, too, was ended when my actor son made

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his exit from the stage of this earthly life. I was thrown back from the joy of contemplating and, as a father, sharing his future, to my own poor efforts which I realize now are indeed hopeless. I know now that even had I genius to write a great play—which I have not—I could not write the sort of play that would find favor in the sight of those who hold the keys to the temple that so many of their plays profane.

I had finished my apprenticeship and was working for a general contractor for regular journeyman painter's wages which were ample to provide me a good boarding place. But my father was without work most of the time that winter and we lived together in three miserable rooms in a tenement house of the same class where I had boarded with my hunchback friend and her semi-idiotic man. We did our own cooking and housekeeping. Every other room in the building was occupied by a prostitute or was a gambling joint. The general tone of the place was such that when one morning a man was found at the foot of the stairs with his throat cut no one was in the least disturbed by the incident. Father invited a comrade who was out of work to move in with us. Then for some reason, never clear to me, he sent for Brother Will to join us.

Will had developed into a fine, strong young man, tall and broad, a man to light any father's eye with pride. For a little while he worked as a rig-builder, but much of the time he too was out of a job. Later he found steadier

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employment in a livery stable. But I do not think Will was happy in Findlay, for it was not long until he went to Missouri to work for father's brother Ben, on a farm. I never saw him again. He was killed by the accidental discharge of a rifle while on a picnic with the pastor of the church of which he was a member and a party of his church friends.

It was while father, his friend, and Will and I were living together that the definite and final break between father and me occurred. I do not mean final in the sense that we had no further relationship—not at all. I mean only that I rebelled finally against his paternal authority and though not of legal age went out from under his control and became wholly my own man.

The immediate cause of our separation was father's anger over my refusal to join the Sons of Veterans. Brother Will was a member of that patriotic body and in his uniform of blue and brass buttons, with cap and all, looked a fine figure of young manhood. But as I was the only one of our family blessed with a steady job, and with grocery and fuel bills and the rent to pay, I felt that I could not afford the Sons of Veterans investment. I really had no thought of dishonoring my G.A.R. father or his beloved comrades. But when I would not be persuaded, father poured out upon me his accumulated wrath. He said, among other things, that I was utterly without patriotism. That I was a damned fool. That I had no pride, no ambition. That I was a disgrace to him and to the family name.



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I did not mind the cursing so much. I can see that from his point of view he had reason for his anger. I certainly was guilty of some sarcastic remarks which were fuel to the flame of his wrath. Also, his love of country and honor and the family name was burning high at the moment, as it always did when he was under the influence of "John Barleycorn." But the hideous injustice of his charges hurt me terribly.

I told him I would never again live under the same roof with him until he apologized. But of course I did not hold to that fiery resolution, and equally of course he never apologized. Many times during the years that followed I helped him out of difficult situations, and you boys know how I provided for him the last twenty years of his life. But the hurt of this injustice and what he did a few months later never healed. I doubt if he himself ever recovered from the sober reaction to what he had done.

I found a place to board with a fine young couple in a good neighborhood, a long way from the quarter of the city where father continued to live. It was not a regular boarding house. The man was employed by the same contractor for whom I worked. They were paying for their little home and took me in for room and meals in order to help out their finances.

I wonder if you boys can imagine what the change meant to me. To have a clean, pleasant room of my own. To sit down to good wholesome, well-cooked meals in company with decent, wholesome people. To be independ-

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ent. To pay my way. To be able to wear decent clothing, regularly laundered and an extra "best suit" for occasions. Most of all, to have the friendly companionship of such a man and woman. It was not long until I had other friends in this new social stratum into which I had been so literally driven. And, wonder of wonders, a girl friend of my own age. Naturally, I now patronized a better class of saloons and pool halls; they cost more, but I could afford it.

Then I made the acquaintance of a middle-aged couple who had formerly been school-teachers. They, too, were paying for their home in our neighborhood and the man was very glad to add to his income by taking me as an evening pupil.

I began my studies, using textbooks which were commonly used by children below the seventh grade. I did not in the least know what use I was going to make of all this "education" which I set out so bravely to acquire. I am not clear now as to why I undertook to acquire it. I suspect it was merely the sprouting of the seed planted in me by that fresco painter. At any rate, I felt that it was the thing for me to do. But among the studies my teacher set for me I was required to write on simple themes of his selection. And that, I suppose, was the actual beginning of the innumerable sins I have since committed with pencil and paper. The most deadly weapons, by the way, ever placed in the hands of a reckless soul. They talk about limiting the sale of firearms and ammunition. Shucks! If they would limit the deadly flow of printers'

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ink, there would be no need to shoot anybody. Having been exposed by my teacher to his infernal "themes," I caught the fever and have been mildly out of my head ever since.

It was not long until I was writing themes which my good teacher neglected to assign to me. All sorts of odds and ends of things that seemed to be struggling within me for a way out. I did not write with any thought of selling, but merely to gratify my own intense desire for something, I knew not what, and because I experienced the keenest pleasure in the effort to put into words whatever it was, shut up within me, that was trying so desperately to escape. Writing was a form of intoxication. Given pencil and paper, I was off on a glorious drunk, a regular hellbender of a spree on words.

When our foreman moved away to another city, my employer promoted me to the vacant position. I was earning good wages now. Three dollars a day, which *was* good forty years ago. I had the assurance of steady work, winter and summer. I had friends of the right sort. I was making progress in my studies. Then, suddenly it all ended. I was once more adrift.

Father was still living in that place where I had left him and it was a thing which happened in connection with him that set me adrift—or, rather, that caused me to cut myself loose from the anchorage I had found. The incident was of a nature which forbids me to relate it. It is enough to say that it did such violence to my memories

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of mother that for the time being I was reduced to a state of hopelessness that effectually wrecked all that I had so far succeeded in building.

Had I been less sensitive and more sensible, less emotional and more thoughtful, I might have ignored the incident and continued on my way. I can see now what a fool I was—not for feeling as I did but for permitting my feeling to take the upper hand of me. It was not so much the incident itself but the significance of it that overwhelmed me. It was in connection with this, too, that I came into possession of that box of mother's things with the little bunch of everlasting flowers. The memories aroused by those immortelles together with the experience which I cannot relate aroused me to such a pitch of feeling that to ignore it was impossible. I felt as if someone had brutally jerked the chain that bound me to a dead weight. I told myself that as long as I remained in that city where I had lived and where my father still lived, in an environment of shame, I could never escape it. I became obsessed with the idea that as long as I was within its reach that life from which I was trying to be free would catch me and drag me back. I must get away, somewhere, anywhere.

There was no real reason for me to go away. There were good reasons why I should not go. And yet I felt myself being literally driven out of that city. As I have said, it was all purely emotional, of course. Equally of course, my emotional reaction to a thing for which I was in no way responsible was caused by the vividness of my

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memories of mother and by that sense of her presence which I so often felt. I knew as clearly as if I were being warned of a physical danger, that I must hide myself from every soul who knew me in that city. I knew I must hide from my own father. I knew I must find some place among strangers where I could live my own life. I cannot tell you how I knew that I must go away; I knew it as I had known what I must do on those other occasions which I have related.

But please do not charge me with anything remotely resembling heroic resolutions. I solemnly assure you there was nothing of the sort. I had no particular purpose in life. I was living, so far as the future was concerned, as wholly in the present as any cabbage in the garden. I had no dreams, no plans, no thoughts of what lay ahead. I was as innocent of a heroic purpose as a vegetable. I had no ambition above the present. The difficulty was that my present was on every hand beset with my immediate past, which I abhorred, and that between that immediate past and my boyhood with mother there was a conflict that kept me on the rack and filled my very soul with misery. It was not that I was highly resolved to climb to any certain height which I saw in the distance. It was only that in self-defense I felt myself forced to get out of the swamp I loathed.

And yet, as you shall see, this definite breaking away from the life I was at the moment living with some apparent success was a definite setting of my life current in the direction in which I seemed destined to be carried. Had

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I continued as I was at this time headed, I should have become, perhaps, a moderately successful house painter and decorator. Perhaps I might even have risen to a business of my own. At least I like to think such a possibility was not beyond my reach.

With very little money in my pocket and with only a small hand-bag containing a change of clothing, toilet articles, and a sketch-book, I stole out of the house in the night like a criminal and on foot made my way into the country.

I have never set foot in that city since. With the exception of my father I have never since met one of the people I knew while living there.

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## VIII

FOR WEEKS I TRAMPED ABOUT THE COUNTRY, AVOIDING the towns, taking any road that my feet strayed into so long as it led farther away from the place I had left behind. I was not a hobo—at least not in my own eyes. I chopped wood and did odd jobs for my meals. When I had money, I bought a few supplies at some crossroads store. I slept under haystacks or wherever I could, when night overtook me. Often in my wanderings I stopped to sketch a wayside scene, or to paint in words as best I could, the moving beauty of the countryside.

One late afternoon I sat on a boulder beside the road overlooking a valley, trying to make a sketch of the scene before the light failed. I was so lost in my efforts and in the intoxication which always overcame me on such occasions that I gave no thought to a night's shelter. Darkness fell and with it a wild storm. I crawled under a hedge at the edge of a bit of woods. Above my head the gale roared and shrieked through the tree-tops. The ground beneath me shook with the crashing thunder and in the glare of the lightning I could see the wildly thrashing branches in the driving rain. It was as if Nature had gone raving mad. Was I unhappy that wild night, lying on the

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ground under the friendly hedge like an animal? I was not. I had escaped. I was free. The things I had come to fear more than any storm of Nature's brewing could not find me under that hedge.

Harvest time came and I worked in the wheat fields. I told no one where I came from or where I was going. I was trying to forget where I had lived, and I did not myself either know or care what lay ahead.

Winter was approaching and I turned my steps toward the city of Cleveland with the thought of finding work at my trade. I knew nothing of Cleveland, but one place was as good as another, just so it was not the place I had left behind me.

Then I experienced another of those strange incidents which directed me as positively and definitely as a traffic policeman would direct one to the city hall.

Late one afternoon I came to a crossroads store and tavern. A man, the storekeeper himself as it developed, was painting the ceiling of a porch. As I drew near it was evident to my professional eye that the man was a rank amateur. In his awkward attempts to apply the paint to the ceiling over his head it splattered his face, ran down his arms, and dripped to the floor in great splashes.

Two neighbors in passing had paused to poke fun at his discomfort and to comment on the unsightly mess he was making.

He retorted with a sheepish grin: "Well, darn it, you know this ain't exactly my kind of a job."



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"It's my kind of a job," said I, "and you'd better let me finish it for you."

The three men looked at me—the one on the stepladder doubtfully, as he might have regarded an angel from heaven.

"Are you a painter?" he demanded.

"I am."

He looked up at the ceiling, considered his dripping hands and arms, and contemplated the paint-splotted floor. Then: "What'll you charge to finish this darned thing?"

"My supper."

He was off that stepladder almost before I had the words out of my mouth.

The two witnesses to the contract watched a moment longer and then, with a couple of parting shots, went on their way.

My employer wanted to know: "How in hell do you keep the stuff from running down the brush all over you?" Then, with a mighty sigh of relief he went away to clean himself.

It was only a short half-hour's work. He gave me the supper for which I had bargained and in addition twenty-five cents.

With a full stomach and a light heart I went on. It was a little after sundown when I saw a stack of wheat in a field not far from the road. There was no house in sight. A few minutes later I had burrowed into that stack

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and was snugly hidden safe and warm in the fragrant grain.

It was sometime during the night when I awoke as suddenly as if someone were shaking me and shouting in my ear. For a few minutes I lay still, listening, holding my breath, my heart pounding, listening. Then cautiously I made an opening and peered fearfully out. A generous moon high in the clear sky made it almost as light as day. I could see no living thing. I could not hear a sound. And yet I knew that I must be on my way. The urge to hurry was irresistible. Up to that moment I had felt no need of haste. But here I was awakened suddenly in the middle of the night with a feeling that I must get to Cleveland as quickly as possible. I seemed to have an appointment with someone there—an appointment which I must not miss. The impression was so strong that I crawled hastily out of my snug nest, got to my feet, and rushed off as if to catch a train.

From then on I walked steadily every hour I could keep awake. I felt myself driven by a force within me that I could neither explain nor resist. I had the feeling that if I did not hurry I should miss something in Cleveland with which it was imperative that I connect. I was afraid to delay. I knew that if I failed to arrive in Cleveland on time, disaster would inevitably follow.

I arrived near the outskirts of the city early one evening. I had now fifteen cents in my pocket. At a little store I purchased five cents' worth of crackers and cheese. An old haystack gave me shelter for the night. Daybreak

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saw me on my way. For breakfast I ate what remained of the crackers and cheese as I tramped along the road. Presently the country road developed into a street with scattered houses on either side. Then I came to a saloon. The saloon-keeper, a fat German, was opening the place for early customers. Encouraged by his friendly greeting, I asked if I might wash up and shave in the back room. He hesitated a moment, looked me over with an experienced eye, then smilingly gave permission. When I had made my toilet and brushed my clothes, except for my travel-stained shoes, I was fairly presentable. The saloon-keeper, for some reason, seemed pleased and cordially set out a huge stein of beer, which I drank gratefully.

I was well into the city before noon. The first boot-black I met acquired my last dime and I went on with shining shoes and an expectant heart.

I very soon discovered that there was no work for a painter at that time in Cleveland. It was one of those periods of business depression when hundreds of thousands of workmen in every industry and trade were idle.

I determined to ship aboard a vessel. I knew I could at least cook. Accordingly I explored the water front and picked out a likely-looking schooner, lying near the outer end of a long wharf. I was alongside the vessel when I knew, all at once, that I must not go aboard. I was suddenly informed that my purpose was a mistake. *That* life was not for me. There was something else, something about which I knew nothing—only that it was waiting for me. There was every reason, including hunger, why I

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should take any job I could get. There was no reason at all why I should not ship aboard any vessel that would have me. But I turned my back and walked hurriedly away as if escaping from a grave danger. You boys know how great is my love for ships and the sea. I am convinced that I missed being a sailor by that narrow margin.

In a newspaper I picked up I read an advertisement for a man to work about the yard, raking up leaves and that sort of thing. I went to the address—an office in the business district. The office was richly furnished. At the moment it was occupied by a beautiful stenographer who sat properly behind a typewriter and two big-bellied, fat-jowled gentlemen, one of whom sat at a desk.

The man behind the desk asked what I wanted.

"Are you Mr. Blank?" I asked.

"Yes."

"I came in answer to your advertisement in the paper for a man to work in the yard."

He looked me over for a long moment.

"What have you been working at?"

"I am a painter by trade, but there is no work now and I am willing to do anything."

"Have you a letter of recommendation?"

"No sir. A man with a trade does not usually carry letters of recommendation. His work is all the recommendation he needs."

Which, of course, was true enough.

The man said coldly: "I don't want you."

"But, sir," I returned desperately, "I am not a bum."

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I am willing to work. I am hungry. You have work. If you won't give me the job, what am I to do?"

He answered harshly: "There's a city rock pile for such as you."

I started for him, but checked myself. Standing in the center of the room, I declaimed in my best melodramatic manner: "I want you to understand, sir, that I no more deserve to work on a rock pile than you do, and you'll live to see the day I prove it." And with all the dignity of my outraged spirit I turned and stalked majestically out. The last thing I saw was the amazed face of the beautiful stenographer. If she is living, I hope she reads this.

As I see it now, it was perhaps the most idiotic, the most impulsive and melodramatic thing I've ever done. I blush as I recall it. I do not mean the underlying principle of the thing: I mean the way I did it. After all, melodrama is not in the underlying truth of a given situation; it is rather in the form and manner of presentation. I still think that I was right in my conception of the situation. I believe still that I was the best man in that office. But the inner truths involved were overwhelmed and lost in the silly melodrama of my words and manner. The most amazing thing is that at that moment I knew what I said was true, prophecy and all.

I used that incident exactly as it occurred in one of my stories and it has been singled out as one of my most flagrant offenses against truth. My wise critic contended that no young man under such circumstances would think

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of saying such a thing—that the incident as a whole was impossible.

The critic was right. The incident was impossible. It is as impossible to me now as it ever was to my critic. But it happened, just the same. As for that, by the time I had reached the street I was laughing at myself.

Night found me sitting on a bench in the park, which in those days was in the heart of the business section of the city. The lights of the buildings that on every side walled in the square of green were not friendly like the stars in the country. There was no kindly haystack handy. I had had nothing to eat since my crackers-and-cheese breakfast. The passers-by did not seem to care.

Then, all at once, a man was sitting beside me. He was a middle-aged man, decently dressed and with an intelligent face. He had a small brown mustache and brown eyes, and the general appearance of a working man, a mechanic of the better class, one would say. He was regarding me with kindly interest.

Presently he spoke: "Out of work?"

"Yes."

"So am I." Then: "Hungry?"

I told him.

Gravely he put his hand in his pocket and fished out a few coins. He counted his capital thoughtfully. Then he said: "I haven't got much left. I know a saloon where they set up a whale of a free lunch. I've got the price of two beers. What do you say?"

If I were disposed to moralize in this book—which I

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am trying desperately not to do—I should comment right here upon the relative merits of those two samples of the human race which I met within those few hours. Consider the man of business—and, from the evidence, I judge, of wealth. He had a home, friends, social position, a business, a richly furnished office, good clothes, a well-filled stomach, influence. And yet for no reason at all except that I needed work, he assumed that I was a criminal, refused to permit me to work, and would have sentenced me to the city rock pile. Then look at the other: A workman out of a job, with only a few pennies between him and hunger. And yet without being asked and without a question, solely upon the visible evidence of my need and in a spirit of sympathetic comradeship, he shared with me, a stranger, all that he possessed.

These two fairly represent the two extremes of the general attitude toward the problem of our needy unemployed. And to my mind in these two attitudes toward this problem, that is more and more pressing upon us all for solution, lie the roots of the whole matter. On the one hand we have the many who with the least possible effort and with not the slightest discomfort to themselves *could* help, but who not only refuse to help but refuse with a wholly gratuitous brutality, threatening honest, deserving want with the punishment administered to criminals. On the other hand are those workers who out of their own poverty give without question to the common enemy of us all—criminal idleness.

To me there is no greater social tragedy than that of the honest, self-respecting and industrious but financially

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poor giving, without question, so large a share of their small earnings to those who, refusing to work, live by clever appeals to their brothers who thus labor to support them.

I do not say that those who have means should contribute without question to every passing request for help. There are probably as many who would, if they could, live without effort upon their more prosperous and ambitious brothers as there are creatures of wealth who look upon every poor devil out of a job as criminally inclined and a social menace. That man who refused to give me the work which for me meant food was right in questioning my real motive in applying for the job. But he was wrong as hell itself in *assuming* that I was not honest when I asked for work and in so brutally proposing to punish me for being without a job. The other man, my friend, was wrong, gloriously wrong, but still wrong in contributing of his own meager and, I have no doubt, hard-earned, funds without a question.

If only these two extremes represented by the man of business of whom I asked merely the job which he could give and the fellow workman who approached me and with no question recklessly divided with me all that he possessed—if only these two could unite in sternly decreeing that no honest workman should in time of need go unaided and that no dishonest idler should be helped in his idleness, our unemployment problems would be solved! The danger involved in the spirit of those who, having much, refuse to help is equaled by the danger in-



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volved in the beautiful but thoughtless generosity of those who, having little, give too much without question. I am a firm believer in city rock piles. I believe as firmly in free lunches.

May I remark, in passing, that it is worth some thinking about, too, that if in the time of my need the Lord sent a ministering angel in the guise of my unknown friend, it was a saloon-keeper who supplied the food.

After dinner my host conducted me to a place where one could have a free bed. At the door he offered me his hand and with a smile bade me good luck. I never saw him again. But I have thought of him a thousand times and always with a warm glow in my heart.

A cool-eyed, unsmiling man of as few words as possible presided over that house of refuge. He required that I autograph a book for him, which I did willingly, as I always do. He required that I take a bath in a bathroom smelling loudly of disinfectant. Fine! He required that I don a clean, if coarse, nightgown before getting into bed. And yet, with all this, I gained the impression that the man had no pleasure in playing his part of host. He had an air of "God forbid that I should be a host." I was made to understand that in performing his duties he was carefully obeying orders issued by someone who paid his salary and that there, in his mind, the matter ended. He certainly gave no hint that he was in the least interested in me and he wasted no breath in making me feel welcome.

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I accepted the charity from the, to me, unknown and therefore impersonal organization which tendered it. I could do nothing else. I was duly grateful, impersonally grateful. But I did not sleep in that charity bed. I could not sleep, for shame. I felt, God knows why, like a criminal. I was not a criminal—not yet. I recognized the need for the register, the bath, the clean nightgown, and the disinfectant, but I am wondering still if human kindness is too expensive to include in the program of our professional charities. I am wondering if our hard-boiled Christian charity workers are not sometimes boiled a little too hard. I still do not think that it was necessary to add to my burden of wretchedness that weight of shame. I do not think that sweet charity gained anything by making me feel like a criminal.

It was there in that charity lodging house that I met the man it evidently was my mission in Cleveland to meet. I think now it was to meet him that I was so rudely awakened that night in the wheat stack and urgently hurried on my way. I think it was to meet him that I was prevented from leaving the city aboard a ship.

He was a cheerful, sophisticated, one-armed, professional hobo. He seemed to take a fancy to me and I quickly came to regard him with a degree of admiration which would have been impossible under other conditions. Here, at last, was one who had solved the problem that was so puzzling me—the problem of how to live without work.

I listened eagerly when he expounded the principles

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of his art and for my benefit drew upon his stores of wisdom. When he said (I repeat it with becoming modesty) that with my face and manners and his experience we could travel anywhere in the world and live like kings, I was pleased. It was heartening to know that I might be good for something, and I could not at the moment find any objection to living like a king. When he proposed that we "team up" and go to California where the winters were so delightfully mild, I assented gladly. It was good to know that someone wanted me.

The following day my partner and I went to the residential district of the city, where he instructed me in the science of collecting food supplies from tender-hearted housewives. In the dusk of early evening he taught me how to sneak into a railroad freight yard, select a proper car in a proper train, and to board the same without benefit of ticket agent or conductor. He improved the evening hours with instructive talk on the superior advantages of his manner of living, with entertaining descriptions of the wonders of California, and with thrilling personal experiences calculated to inspire me with a spirit of emulation. He inspired me, all right, but not with the particular brand of inspiration which he intended.

About daybreak he informed me that our car was being set out. I believed him. I would have said that we were experiencing a succession of those horrible railway collisions that one reads about. When the crashing, smashing turmoil ceased and the sounds of our departing train

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died away we cautiously slid the door open a crack and looked and listened.

It was a likely-looking town, my expert companion said, and he decided that as we were there we'd better look around and lay in a store of supplies for our westward journey on a through freight. He said it would be best for us not to operate together and assured me that he would keep an eye on me and pick me up later in the day. With another look around, he slipped out of the car and disappeared. When I dropped from the car doorway, a little later, I was caught in the act by the station agent, who was on his way to begin the day's work.

The railroad man looked me over. Then he asked what I was doing there.

I told him and inquired if there was any chance of my finding a job of any kind in that town.

He looked me over again. Then he said he doubted if I could find work at my trade, but that they were building a large schoolhouse in the village and I might find something to do there.

I thanked him and was starting off when he stopped me with "Wait a minute."

I waited.

He looked me over some more. Then he smiled. "Have you had any breakfast?"

"No sir."

"Come with me."

I went.

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He took me to his boarding house and said to the landlady: "Give this boy a good breakfast and charge it on my bill."

It was the first real meal I had had for, it seemed to me, ages.

With fresh courage, inspired by the happy combination of friendliness and food, I steered straight for that school building which was under construction.

The superintendent in charge, a big open-faced Swede, asked: "What can you do?"

"I am a painter by trade, but I'll do anything."

"You wouldn't handle brick with them hands?"

"You try me and see."

Five minutes later I was catching brick, as they were tossed to me from a wagon. Fifteen minutes later the boss came to me with a pair of leathers for my hands which were already bleeding. He made no comment, but reinforced me with a slow Swedish grin.

Noon came. The boss gave me fifty cents and directed me to a house not far away where I could get dinner. He did better than that: he told me to engage board, because I had a job with him as long as that schoolhouse contract lasted.

And that was the end of my hobo experience. I have many times since reflected how in acquiring that job and a regular boarding place I missed my one great opportunity to lay a firm foundation for future literary standing. Had I continued with my competent teacher, I might have landed in California as a qualified pro-

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fessional. True, I might have landed in jail. But, then, most of us hobo novelists ought to be in jail, anyway.

My expert adviser, on how to live like a king without work, lingered on in the village for several days, trying to convince me of my error. Then, expressing his disgust in language most fitting, he vanished. I learned later that he was helped out of town by the village authorities.

And yet that one-armed hobo was a most important factor in shaping my life and in leading me in the way by which I eventually arrived at my life work. In the chain of circumstances he was the definite and vital link between that period of drifting, when I lived to no purpose, content merely to be alive, and the period which followed when I was awakened to a consciousness of life as a whole and to a sense of responsibility for my part in it.

Turn back, now, to that night when I was awakened so suddenly with the feeling that I must be on my way to Cleveland and was driven with so irresistible an urge to hurry as if to keep a definite appointment. Had I failed to be at that park bench at that certain hour I should have missed meeting the man who conducted me to that "house of refuge." Had I slept in that place a night later I should never have met the guide who was so well qualified to conduct me to this village where the whole course of my future was to be set.

I did not know it at the time, but when I dropped out of that box car I had arrived on the scene of a great adventure. The days of my drifting were behind me.

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## IX

**B**EFORE THE NEW SCHOOL BUILDING WAS FINISHED I had convinced a prominent citizen that his house needed painting—which it did, badly—and had persuaded him to give me the job.

Before I had finished painting Mr. Prominent Citizen's house I was asked to name a contract price to do another. But to contract jobs meant capital or credit.

The merchant who sold painting materials said to me: "My boy, everybody knows how you arrived in this town. But your credit is good with me for anything you want. Go ahead with your contracting."

And so, presently, I was fairly established in a business of my own, with a shop, business cards, and everything: House Painting, Signs, Carriage Work, Paper Hanging, and Decorating. There was nothing too modest about my professional claims.

I continued boarding with the family to whom the Swede superintendent had sent me. They were laboring people, staunch members of a church. For the first time since my boyhood I attended services regularly; mainly, I suppose, because there was no place else to go. Certainly I was not in the least "drawn to the church." So far as I was aware, it meant nothing to me. I felt vaguely

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that the church was all right for those who did not know life in the raw as I had experienced it. But the preacher, with his, to me, immaterial and irrelevant theological discussions, seemed to be apart from life. It seemed to me that both the preacher and his church were incapable of dealing—or at least did not deal—with life as I knew it.

My best friend was the station agent and telegraph operator who had met me at the train the morning of my arrival. He was a well-principled, philosophical-minded young man, and we together settled many problems which badly needed settling. You boys know how it is done.

My business extended to the country roundabout and to a neighboring village. During the winter I supplemented my professional activities by working nights and mornings in a dairy, milking. Summer came again and the fall. Not a soul in that city from which I had escaped knew where I was. My father did not know whether I was living or dead. I never mentioned the name of that city to my new friends.

Then one day a gentleman called at my little paint shop. He introduced himself as the evangelist who was going to hold a series of meetings in a tent. I had already heard this religious project much discussed among my church friends and was slightly amused at the nerve of the chap coming with his tent and his (to the other Christians, offensive) doctrines, to a village which already had more churches than it could properly support. The evangelist wanted me to paint several notices of the



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meetings and a number of hangers and banners for his tent auditorium. These latter were quotations from the Bible and other sayings calculated to give the key to the particular doctrines for which his denomination stood. Because he was a preacher, I followed the usual custom and did the job for nothing.

But what I painted on those hangers for the walls of the evangelist's tent gave me much food for thought. Then, purely out of curiosity and my liking for this young preacher who had set himself to battle in the very heart of the enemy's country, I attended the first meeting. Perhaps, too, I wanted to see how my work showed up.

The evangelist presented a view of the Christian religion which was entirely new to me. I discussed it with my friend the station agent. I continued attending the meetings. I was tremendously interested to learn that one might be a Christian without subscribing to the distinctive doctrines of any particular one of the many warring denominations. In other words, one might become a Christian without becoming a Methodist, a Baptist, a Congregationalist, a Presbyterian, or anything else.

The evangelist belonged to an organized body of Christians who called themselves simply Christians or Disciples of Christ. They constituted, they said, the Christian Church, or the Church of Christ. He preached the teachings of Jesus as those teachings are presented in the life and words of the Man of Galilee. He pled for the union of all denominations under the name "Christian"; this

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union to be effected by discarding all man-made creeds and basing church fellowship upon the beliefs in, and the acceptance of, the Christ.

I was tremendously moved. The very simplicity of the idea was startling. I had never thought of Christianity as apart from denominations. The vision of a united church was thrilling. The appeal which Jesus of Nazareth has ever had, and must ever have, for men took deep hold of me.

Remember, I was not by now an innocent, unsophisticated boy. I had seen enough of evil living, God knows. My early experiences with those church people for whom I worked immediately after mother's death had not predisposed me to an acceptance of Christianity. From my point of view there was too much rain water in their vinegar. From my boyhood days at Milan I had grown to manhood without church or Christian contacts. I had lived in the midst of, and on the most familiar terms with, the most debasing sin. Through those formative years of my youth I had been held, so far as I was held, from the environment in which I was placed by nothing more than the memories of my mother, by the living influence of my childhood companionship with her, and by those occasions when I was so strongly conscious of her presence. The simple eternal rightness of Jesus, unobscured by the confusions of theological doctrines, had never before been presented to me. I felt it as I felt the completeness, the rightness, the eternal beauty of nature. I felt it as I felt my mother. It was related to my boyhood life with

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mother, as sunshine is related to the sun. I could no more question the reality of it than I could deny the reality of my mother or my boyhood companionship with her.

And this rightness which I felt in the personality, in the living examples of Jesus' busy life and in His teachings was the rightness of service. As I visioned it, Christianity was not something which one merely believed or rejected, any more than the air or the sunshine, the day or the night, were merely to be believed or rejected. Neither was it something which one received as a free gift and by which one escaped hell or gained heaven. It was not a good bargain that one made with God and thereby gained eternal bliss for practically nothing. I saw Christianity as something which one *was*. It was a principle of living, a manner of thinking, a way of behaving, so that one's life should count as a service to all life.

I saw that to drift as I had been drifting was not to know the fullness of living. I saw that to experience the fullness of living—to *live* genuinely—I must be on my way to something beyond the near horizon of the passing day. I saw that to drift was to exist within the narrowness of oneself, and that such existence denies to one the depth and reach and movement of life which alone makes existence in the present world endurable. I saw that to experience the richness and beauty of living one must feel oneself not as a single life, separate and apart from the whole, but as an inseparable member of the whole, as a part of all life.) In moving toward that unseen and unknowable but certain end, as a river flows to the sea, one

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must have the consciousness of being, not an independent separate entity, but inseparable from the whole, as a single drop of water in a stream is inseparable from the flowing volume of the whole.

And I saw, too, that this consciousness of oneness with all life was nothing more, nothing less, than receiving and giving—a fluid intermingling of what one is with what all others are—a flowing of oneself to and from all others, the consciousness of serving and of being served. To make one's life a contribution, however great or small, to the life of one's day and generation, not in the sense of giving but in the sense of being a part of, to recognize and react to the contributions that others, however great or small, make to the life which all have in common—this, to me, became the sum and substance of living.

I do not mean to say that, at the time, I definitely analyzed this new consciousness which came to me from my contemplation of the Master Servant of all the ages. One does not need to analyze a conviction in order to be moved by it. That comes later.

Many times I have been asked: "How do you set about writing a novel?"

Well, the idea for a story usually comes to me in a flash. It is a thought that is more than a thought; it is a conviction. It is sensed rather than thought. It is more an emotion than a reason. It is born of feeling rather than logic. It comes, of course, out of experience and observation. But while the idea comes in a flash of conviction, I must spend many months of thinking before I am able

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finally to shape it into a story. Nevertheless, when to the best of my ability, I have thought out the original idea, when I have worked long hours over it and have nursed and coaxed that first flash into something like a steady flame—when, in short, the tale is finished—it is still the story I sensed in the beginning.

So this idea of service, which I sensed at this time when Jesus of Nazareth was set before me, unobscured by the confusion of theological vaporings, so that I visioned Him in the simple grandeur of Himself, was not in my mind as fully defined or developed as it is today. But the living truth of it that I sensed rather than took hold of mentally, was enough to transform my whole understanding of life and from then on to make it the key to my life's endeavor.

I have been working out the idea ever since. I am still working it out. Many times I have for a little while lost sight of the light which flashed for me, torch-like, at that time. But always I have seen it again and have come back to it. And always, after the darkness, it has burned for me clearer and brighter. My ideas of the church and church doctrines have undergone many changes. My conceptions of Deity have altered. But this idea of Christianity has not changed. By "Christianity" I mean those eternal truths which Jesus lived and taught. I say "eternal truths" because the things that Jesus taught are not true because He taught them: He taught them because they were true. And they were true ten thousand years before His time, as they will be true ten thousand years hence.

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With ever increasing clearness of vision I have seen that to live is to serve and that all true service is Christian. That is why I say the experience was a great adventure.

But the evangelist went further than the simple, clear, and understandable teachings of Jesus. He preached also what his church held to be the teachings of Paul and those other writers whose letters, variously interpreted by theological scholars, are the chief cause of the multiplications of conflicting denominations against which he crusaded. In his arraignment of the denominational differences that have proved so destructive to the cause of Christianity, he became as one of them. In his plea for the simple teaching of Jesus, he expounded theological theories as ably as any ecclesiastical lawyer that ever buttoned a collar behind.

But it was the simplicity of the idea that it was enough to be a Christian, and that to be a Christian was to accept the teachings of Jesus as the guiding principle of one's life, which appealed to me. I was so blinded by this great light that I did not see the foolishness of the other things he preached. With the truth which so attracted me I accepted without question all the rest of the doctrines he preached. As I see it now, I accepted them not because they appealed to me but because the evangelist included them in his presentation of the one great truth that literally opened to me a new conception of life, with a new standard of living, and for the first time gave me a definite purpose in life. I was so irresistibly attracted to this central truth of the evangelist's preaching and by the liv-

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ing beauty of the character, life, and teaching of Jesus, that I became a member of the evangelist's church—the Christian Church or Disciples of Christ.

By this act I of course subscribed to the doctrinal interpretations of the denomination. But these, I can see now, I accepted in the spirit of one who in voting for an important legislative measure accepts a rider to the bill. I did not disbelieve in those additional tenets to which I in effect subscribed. I did not think much about them. I felt that they were probably as right as any other interpretation. Theological discussions were all so far beyond me. Nor do I consider that I was dishonest in becoming a member of the church upon the sole authority of the preacher. I felt that this church was the means through which I could best live my new-born convictions and by which I could carry out the new purpose that (I choose the word with care) inspired me. I was to learn later that in their plea for the union of all Christians, in their war against denominations and in their contentions for their particular interpretations of the doctrines of the New Testament letter-writers, these Disciples of Christ were as contentious in spirit, as bigoted in opinion, as intolerant of fellow Christians in other churches, and as offensively sectarian as any of the denominations they so heartily condemned.

As you boys may have noticed, all reformations are alike, in that they set out with enthusiasm to free the world from certain chains; and when they have freed enough of the world to make a respectable following,

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they as enthusiastically proceed to replace the shackles from which they loosed their followers with chains of their own forging.

Fired as I was with the zeal of my new understanding of life, and moved by a sincere purpose to make to all life whatever contribution lay within the limits of my ability, it was not difficult for the evangelist to persuade me that it was my duty to become a Christian preacher.

I had no particular leaning toward the ministry. I desired only to serve. It was the evangelist who decided I could best serve by becoming a preacher. To that end I must go to school.

The evangelist was himself a student in his senior year at Hiram College, a school conducted by the Disciples. He was married, and I could work for my board in his home. A Christian gentleman who delighted to help young men to an education loaned me the necessary money to start. This he did upon the evangelist's recommendation. I never met him. I have often wondered if he was satisfied with his investment. In any case, I am happy to say that later I was not only able to repay the loan but to pass it on many times multiplied to others. His service to me has expanded into a service to many and will continue to expand, as such deeds of helpfulness have a way of doing, indefinitely.

It was just a year from the time of my Cleveland experience when I returned to that city on my way to school. You will allow that whatever my one-armed hobo might



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not have been, he was, for me, so far as he went, a good guide.

But I must hasten to explain, that while I studied at Hiram College, I never went to college. That most excellent institution of learning, luckily for me, was not only a college, it was a preparatory school as well. It was even better than that: it conducted a pre-preparatory school. This pre-prep department was, roughly, something less than high school, and it was as far as I ever won toward a college education. It is said that I was a student of Hiram College, but the sad fact is that while I was a student at Hiram, I left that place of learning long before I could have entered the college.

I now felt that I should let my father know what had happened. I thought he would be glad to hear that I was going to school. His answer was characteristic:

Who ever told you that you had brains enough to get an education? Don't think that you can count on any help from me. I will not give you a single penny for any such nonsense. I had not suggested that he help me and I answered his letter with the assurance that I had no intention of calling on him for aid.

At the same time I wrote Auntie Sue. More closely than any other living person she was associated in my mind with mother and I knew how happy she would be to have such news of me. The dear old lady was past teaching now and had little enough to keep her. I wish I could give you here the beautiful letter she wrote me. With the letter was a five-dollar bill.

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## X

**M**Y LIFE AT HIRAM WAS ALL COMMONPLACE ENOUGH. But let the most commonplace incident be followed by a wholly unexpected situation or event, and the poor little insignificant, everyday happenings will be tortured into weird and fantastic proportions. Most of the things you boys have heard about my alleged college days have been fearfully and wonderfully imagined. I have been credited with genius which I most certainly never possessed, and with equal enthusiasm damned for sins which in my wildest dreams I never thought of committing. It is astounding and sometimes not a little embarrassing to have so many people I never knew knowing so many things about me that I never knew about myself. It is what happened to me—the inside of me, I mean—which no one but myself could possibly know that concerns us in this book.

The chief benefit that I derived from this educational experiment, I think, was my disillusionment. You see, I had never before come in contact with college folk. The only persons approaching the educated class that I had met were my half-soused fresco painter adviser and my ex-teacher friend. My limited experience in public schools

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was not enough to prepare me. With my questionable gift of seeing any old goose, in which I happened to be interested, as a royal swan, I glorified to myself that humble institution of learning as it probably was never glorified before nor has been since. I tiptoed about as if I trod on sacred ground. The members of the faculty were as gods, with a prexy, Zeus, who filled my trembling soul with awe. The upper class men and women were superior beings who habitually moved in an atmosphere so exalted that I was breathless in their presence.

You boys cannot appreciate all this, because you entered your universities decently and in order. You found it trying enough to be regularly certified freshmen. So have a heart when you think of your pre-prep dad, two degrees lower than a frosh.

Coming as I did fresh from that evangelistic tent meeting, with the glow of my great adventure still in my heart, I, naturally, accorded those who were studying for the ministry the highest seats in this intellectual and spiritual Olympus. With their Greek and Latin, their homiletics and exegesis, and Heaven knows what else I had never heard of, I felt my pre-prep self, in their presence, the lowest of the low. And believe me, boys, they agreed with me.

Then things began to happen. It was ludicrous—or, rather, it is funny now—the way those honest college folk whom I had so solemnly deified came tumbling down from their lofty perches as fast as I became acquainted with them. When I heard one of those august professors

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discuss for a full class period whether a certain altar in early Hebrew times had been built on the east side or the west side of the Jordan River, and close his lecture with the profound statement that it was impossible ever to decide the question and that it mattered not at all which side of the river the altar was located, I fell from the clouds with a sickening thud. Even I could see that there was nothing godlike in such piffle. To call such learned drivel "teaching" was ridiculous. A student might better employ his time picking daisies and repeating the ancient formula: "She loves me, she loves me not." I soon discovered, too, that many of the students concurred in my opinion; at least they picked the daisies. My disillusionment was complete when I saw two of my most revered ministerial students in class writing the Ten Commandments on the blackboard with the aid of a "pony."

I can see, now, how good all this education was for me. As my stock in these Olympians depreciated, my own values were correspondingly elevated. And this was exactly what I needed. If it is not good for a man to think too highly of himself, the converse is equally true.

The situation was saved for me by certain other professors and students who compelled my increasing admiration and regard. As I came to see these in more humanized form, my appreciation of them grew. When I had swung too far in the direction of an impossible hero-worship, they held me from swinging too far in the opposite direction and so finally settled me down to fairly regular ticking. I doubt if these men—true salt of the earth—

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ever dreamed of the service they rendered the pre-prep, which is as it should be. For these, too, the years have not dimmed my veneration for the quality of their minds and for their Christ-like characters. So I managed somehow to live through the drastic and most painful readjustments of that first year.

At odd moments, between school work and working for my board, I continued my habit of writing for my own pleasure all sorts of odds and ends of impressions, observations, and descriptive bits of characters and scenes. Two or three of my pieces got themselves into print and were noticed by the Hiramites. It seems unnecessary to say they were so punk that only an editor of a denominational church paper could have found space for them. When I was not trying to relieve myself by writing, I was messing around with pencil and sketch-pad or brushes and colors. As for my studies, I managed to make the grade.

But at the close of that year I was in a sadly unsettled state of mind. The appeal which the character, life, and teaching of Jesus had made to me was as strong as ever. My conceptions of life, born of that experience in the evangelistic tent meeting, were not changed. But grave doubts had risen in my mind as to the service I could render as a preacher. There were so many things about preachers, as I had come to know them now, which made me feel that it would be difficult if not impossible for me ever to qualify as a professional. I questioned if I could ever persuade myself to pull in the denominational harness with which it was the main business of Hiram College

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to fit its ministerial colts. And I was dead sure that I could never be as devout as those pious broncos pretended to be. They were too good to be true. Their godliness smelled too much of the salaries and the honors they hoped to acquire. They wore an air of expecting their piety to pay. They were, in short, even as you and I.

I did not, even in my own mind, commit myself to a decision that I would not preach. I simply decided to remain fairly open to conviction and await developments. I felt that if preaching was to be my work, the job would find me out. I would never go after it.

And that, curiously enough, is exactly what happened. It happened, too, in a most unexpected place, many miles from Hiram College and an immeasurable distance from the atmosphere of that school.

I may add here, parenthetically, that while I served ten years as a parson, I never for a moment felt myself to be other than an amateur, and that my preaching brethren quite generally agreed I never had qualified as a professional. But I shall tell you about all that later.

That summer I contracted to paint some of the college buildings, and so remained in Hiram.

I started my second pre-prep year with a better footing so far as my understanding of college folk went. I was no longer a bronco in a strange corral. I knew my way around. I did not shy even when I met prexy face to face. Also, I took a better and more workman-like grip of my studies and felt at home in the class room.

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I continued writing and sketching at odd times, with more and more of my leisure given to writing. I even wrote a book—a weird, fantastic, impossible, amateurish sort of thing through which I have always felt I acquired merit by not offering it for publication as some of my well-meaning friends urged me to do.

If only well-meaning friends would not be so infernally inspiring to poor souls who are cursed with a desire to write, what a world of suffering might be avoided! The writer's itch is a breaking out in a grievous form of rash, and the more it is scratched the worse it is. When the disease is irritated, no matter how friendly the touch, the sufferer is driven well-nigh frantic; and so, I may add, are the rest of us.

Also that year I painted the scenery for the senior play.

And all this time the habit of study and the lust for learning were taking deeper and deeper hold on me. But I was not yet aware that I was becoming student-minded. That strange mental malady creeps upon one so gradually.

I was awakened in a most unexpected manner to what those two pre-prep years at Hiram had done to me.

I had formed a deep friendship with one of my fellow students. It was one of those young-men friendships which sometimes spring from a mutual liking with a reckless disregard for anything else. He was the son of a Cleveland multimillionaire, and it would seem that the son of such really great wealth and the son of such extreme poverty could have little in common. But we had so much

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in common that we mutually defied the immeasurable difference in our circumstances and stations. I shall not tell you his name, but in my novel "When a Man's a Man" he is "The Honorable Patches."

My friend invited me to spend the Christmas holidays at his home, his invitation being reinforced by his parents and his brothers and sisters.

I must have declined somewhat haughtily, for he thrashed awkwardly about my room for a little, then burst forth with: "Look here, I know damn well what you're thinking; but it's not so."

"All right," I returned. "If that's the case, I'll go."

Of course I had never seen anything like that home. I was stunned. It was equipped with every luxury that wealth could command. There was a farm of thoroughbred racers, a stable of pedigreed carriage and saddle horses, and the fastest yacht on the Great Lakes. There were paintings and art treasures assembled from every land. And never, in my wildest dreams, had I imagined such a Christmas.

One day my chum and I drove, behind his own pet buggy horse, to the outskirts of the city and found the decaying fence rails and scraps of timber upon which had stood the haystack where I slept that night previous to my first visit to Cleveland, a little more than two years before. I felt that Time was hustling me along at a fairly good clip. And certainly it was a long, long way from that haystack to the millionaire home of my friend. But oh, how Time has hurried me since!



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When summer came I foolishly accepted financial help from my friend, in order that I might devote my time to writing. You see, being young and something of an idealist himself, he believed in me. His belief in turn built up my own confidence to a wholly unreasonable point. I worked hard enough at my foolishness, but I was not at ease. I felt instinctively that it was a mistake—that I ought rather to be working at my trade, earning my own bread and butter and saving against the coming school year. I was harassed, too, by a nagging sense of shame. Naturally, my work mounted to exactly nothing.

Then my friend insisted that I join a house party at his home. Again my love for him persuaded me against my better judgment, and I went.

And then it was, in that environment of wealth and luxury where I had no business to be, that I met the man who crystallized into definite purpose all that my experience in the evangelist's tent meeting and all that my Hiram College contacts had given me.

He was an artist, a landscape painter of Royal Academy rank. An American, he had spent most of his life abroad and had been decorated by several foreign powers. He was in this country for a brief visit, and by that strange chance which always seemed to take a hand in my affairs at critical times he too was a guest in my friend's home. Because an artist must always be at his work, he spent a part of each day in a temporary studio.

A confirmed bachelor, old enough to have been my father, distinguished in a world which in every respect was

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foreign to my poor little world, this man for some reason became my most patient, understanding, and inspiring friend. I spent hours with him in his studio while he made magic with brushes and colors. I never dared to tell him that I had ever attempted trifling sketches. As silent and as spellbound as, when a child, I had watched my first artist friend, I would sit and watch him at his work. The only difference was that now I smoked.

Those experiences with that artist-farmer friend of my boyhood came back to me with amazing force. The gate into his world of beautiful living was again opened wide and I was invited to enter freely. Vividly I lived again my companionship with mother. Under the spell of my association with this new artist friend, all that she taught me to see and feel was renewed a hundredfold. All that I had experienced since mother's death only served to intensify my reaction to the things this great artist soul set before me. Once he told me, with one of his rare shy smiles, that he liked to have me there because he could paint better when I was with him. What an amazing thing for a distinguished artist to say to an illiterate, poverty-stricken youth! Can you imagine what it did to me?

Often he would talk to me of art—not the silly jargon of those who vainly strive, by technical parrot words of which they themselves know not the meaning, to be thought artists, but the simple understandable phrases of one who could speak with authority and was concerned only to make his meaning clear. Nor did he, in these talks, speak only of painting. He talked of art as a whole—of

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its meaning and its relation to life. Sometimes he would take me to look at pictures painted by other artists and would help me to see them with understanding appreciation. Sometimes we lunched together in some little out-of-the-way corner of the city; and while we ate the plain and simple fare, he fed my soul with the things I was so hungry to hear: bits of observation and experience from his own life while he was struggling for recognition and after he had won to his distinguished position; bits of his own personal philosophy and understanding of life.

He encouraged me to read to him some of the things I had written. And in a simple matter-of-fact way that made me feel his sincerity he would say: "You'll do it some day, lad. Keep hammering away. Some day it will come." And then all the fire of him which was commonly hidden beneath his placid exterior would burst forth and he would command me sternly: "And when your time comes, hit them hard! Hit them with all your might."

As I look back now, over the forty years that have passed since those days of which I am writing, I can see with clearer understanding this crisis in the development of my spiritual self. I dimly sensed at the time what was happening to me, but I could not know then as I know now the full significance of the experience—or, if you like, experiment—which I was undergoing. As I see it now, Fate, Circumstance, Chance, God, what you will, had strangely placed me between two eternally conflicting forces. And believe me, my sons, when I say "eternally

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conflicting forces," I am not using words carelessly or with any fanciful intent. With every year of my observation and study of life my sense of the reality of these opposing forces has increased. With every year my appreciation of the parts they play, not only in forming the characters of individuals but in the building of humanity as a whole, has grown.

I wish I could visualize those forces for you as I now see them. The life swirling about that house of material riches (yachting parties, the races, theater parties, dinners) every luxury, extravagance, and pleasure that money could buy. The life revealed to me by the old artist as he told me of his early years of hardship and work and privation, as he talked to me of art and its meaning and place in the spiritual development of Man, as he awoke to fresh vividness the memories of my childhood, of mother, and of my first artist friend; the realities of truth and beauty which he led me to feel and accept; the nobility of serving in any capacity the spiritual needs of men; the baseness of accepting every material service with never a thought of making adequate return. The gay extravagance of the house party, the perpetual search for pleasure in the gratification of every whim. The grinding toil of his years of effort to realize for a few fellow beings a little of that saving beauty which is for all who will have it.

For every item of my share in that house party I was dependent upon the generosity of my host. Every hour I spent with my artist friend made me more ashamed of my position. Warm-hearted and generous as my welcome

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was, I knew I had no right to be a guest in that home of wealth. I had no right, I say, to any part of that life. I did not belong. Every circumstance of my life decreed for me something different. I loved my rich chum, his mother, and the family. I appreciated their intended kindness to the poverty-stricken, homeless nobody. I am happy I can add that our friendship has endured through the years. But more and more, under the influence of the wise old artist, I understood how terribly wrong I was in accepting those particular favors for which I could make no semblance of a return. I was in the way of becoming that most despicable of all creatures—a human parasite that feeds upon the bounty of its host and exists only to receive.

Between the artist and the house party, as you may imagine, I was in a miserable state of mind. I became morose, sullen, sitting in scowling silence amid the gayety, withdrawn into my disagreeable shell. I wonder those dear friends and their guests did not vote unanimously to drown me in the lake, and carry out their just decision. Indeed, I think they would have eliminated me in some violent fashion had it not been for my chum's mother, who was one of the most generous, motherly souls that ever lived. She once said to me laughingly: "You see, Hal, I feel toward you as if you were one of my boys. I really had to adopt you or disown my own sons, so there's nothing you can do about it." I think she guessed, too, a little of what was happening to me. She was the kind of woman who would guess that sort of thing.

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Toward the last the old artist offered to take me abroad with him, and assured me of work enough to support me while I went on learning to write. But I think he was glad to have me say that I was not ready yet, that I must go to work right here at home. He laughed and there was a little note in his laughter which made me understand that I had made the correct answer. "All right, lad," he said. "What does it matter where one works? But I shall hear of you. I know that I shall hear of you."

When I bade my chum good-bye, one morning, he knew what the others did not know—that I had just fifty cents in my pocket. Taking out his own well-filled purse, he offered it to me with the words: "For God's sake, old man, take it. You know I have more than I can use." I shook my head. I could not. I had accepted quite enough of other people's money to know that, even when it was accompanied by such loyal and generous friendship, it would not do. The thought of continuing such a one-sided situation had become so abhorrent to me that not even my love for my chum could make it longer bearable. I knew the way I must go.

"But where are you going?" he demanded.

I laughed. "I'm going as far as fifty cents will take me on the railroad. After that . . ."

"You'll write to me?"

"Perhaps, when I am able to buy my own postage stamps." Then I added seriously: "If I succeed, you shall hear from me. If I fail, you will not care to hear. So long."

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I walked away, leaving him standing there on the front steps, looking after me.

I am glad I can tell you that in after years I was able to repay my financial obligation to this friend. For his loyalty and love, and for all that our friendship has contributed to my life, no amount of money could ever pay.

When I called at the studio to bid my artist friend good-bye, the old man, wiser than my school chum, did not offer me money. He did better. He put aside his work in spite of my protest and walked to the station with me. He even went aboard the train and saw me to my seat. Slipping a handful of cigars into my coat pocket, he said smilingly: "As you smoke them, think of me." Then he gripped my hand. "I shall hear of you, lad. I know that I shall hear of you."

He turned quickly and hurried from the car. As the train pulled out, he stood on the platform, waving good-bye. I never saw him again.

This artist who came, through so strange a combination of circumstances into my life at a time when I sorely needed him, was Sir Gilbert Munger. And you, my first-born son, know now why you are named Gilbert Munger Wright.

That afternoon I left the train at a little station in the country and struck out on foot. When night came I found a hospitable haystack. At daybreak I was again on my way. And it is no figure of speech when I say that I went with a song in my heart. My chin was up with a fine feel-

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ing of independence. I was my own man again. I was free.

And now, perhaps, you boys will better understand why, since your earliest childhood, I have insisted with almost fanatical earnestness that you must not go where you cannot pay your way. That experience with my rich friend and his house party burned into me such an abhorrence of certain kinds of indebtedness that I have never been able to overcome it or rid myself of the feeling of shame when memory brings the incident back to me. Naturally, I have endeavored to pass on to you my feeling toward such things, with the hope of saving you from the shame I have suffered.

I would rather live in a shack in the desert, if it was mine and paid for, than to dwell in a palace that belonged to my creditors. I would rather go on foot all my days than ride always in a luxurious automobile that was owned by someone else. I would rather dine on crackers and sardines and drink ditch water than sit day after day at a table served with choice food and rare wines for which someone else always paid.

I hope you, my sons, will have in your lives many friends to whom you will always owe more than you can pay. From my indebtedness to that old hunchbacked cook who befriended me in my youth I can never be free. The debt I owe the artist friend of my childhood, and all that I owe to Sir Gilbert, must forever go unpaid. Such obligations enrich debtor and creditor alike. But this other thing



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—you know what I mean—living beyond one's means, working everybody for favors, accepting social or financial hand-outs, seeking special privileges, striving to keep up an appearance of financial or social position beyond one's honest means; four-flushing, sham, pretense—these things are to me loathsome beyond expression.

Nor does this matter concern you alone as individuals. As citizens of this nation you must hold it of primary importance. If you do not now so hold it, you will, long before you are my age, be forced to do so. And the process of pressing the national importance of this question upon you and your children will not be pleasant.

Consider the state to which this go-in-debt, live-beyond-your-means, get-something-for-nothing philosophy has already reduced us. Our churches over their spires in debt, not to the glory of God but to outshine competing denominations in the same neighborhood! Our grafting public officials who take solemn oath to serve the people and then drain the taxpayers to their own profit as ruthlessly as ever a pirate scuttled a defenseless ship! Our gambling princes of the market whose only claim to greatness is based upon the millions of loot they have taken without rendering one penny's worth of service in return! Our high-pressure salesmen who cry without ceasing: "Buy! Buy! Buy! whether you need or not. Buy! Buy! Buy!" If you have nothing, go in debt. If you are in debt, go deeper in debt. Borrow, beg, or steal for the first payment, and to hell with the future." This devil-brewed philosophy of something-for-nothing has made of us a nation

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of mortgaged farms, looted homes, wrecked banks, bankrupt business institutions, destitute families, jobless workmen, undernourished children. It has delivered us into the hands of underworld mobsters and racketeers, crooked politicians and financial pirates. We have accomplished this, I say, because in the madness of this ruling philosophy we see black debt as white prosperity and pay highest honor to those who gain the most for the least. And still we go on piling up the staggering load we bear, in our insane delusion that the only way to relief is by adding more and still more weight to our burden.

Blessed, blessed independence! No price is too great to pay for it. No struggle is too severe that leads to its attainment.

To owe no man any material thing, to make oneself the spiritual debtor to all the world, to take and take and take from the fullness of life until one's own life is so filled with spiritual riches that it overflows to the enrichment of all men. This, my sons, is my philosophy of debt. Because this philosophy came to me out of that experience with the house party and the artist, I have given the incident a place in this book to you.

I had settled quite definitely now, in my own mind, what I must do. That year I would work and save and the following year return to school. I told myself that I would go as far as college and universities could take me. If ever a homeless, penniless, pre-prep hitched his little student wagon to an educational star, I was now that am-

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bitious disciple of learning. I vowed that nothing should stop me. I saw clearly the road I purposed to travel. Hiram College, then one of our American universities, then abroad to all that the great institutions of learning there could give me. I did not know exactly how I was to accomplish all this, but I told myself with full confidence that step by step I should find a way.

I felt strongly that I had been asleep and that Sir Gilbert had awakened me. I berated myself for the time I had lost since school closed. I had been a silly fool to permit myself to be side-tracked by my friendship with the son of wealth. He could not know what I had lost; how could he? But I knew. And as clearly as I now saw the situation from which I had escaped, I felt, back of Sir Gilbert's influence, the conception of life which I had gained in that evangelistic tent meeting. Sir Gilbert did not know, but I knew that it was that experience and the conviction that really to live was to serve, which made possible the effect of his teaching and his influence over me.

That I was no longer convinced I must serve as a preacher did not in the least lessen my conviction that to live was to serve. Serving meant to me, now, whatever one could do best that would in any measure contribute to the better living of all. The ministry of the pulpit was to me, now, no more holy than the ministry of art or of labor, of science or of teaching. The call to preach was no more divine than the call to paint a picture, to write a book, to plow a field, or to build a house. The purpose

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that inspired the work made the call divine. This call to scholarship which I now felt so strongly was to me a call to fit myself for service. It was a call to make my contribution to life the greatest possible contribution of which I was or might become capable. If time should prove that preaching was my work, then I would preach. I would permit my own development to decide what I could do best.

It was the beginning of the Hiram school year and while I knew that it was impossible for me to enter, I felt that I must see the place again before settling down to finding a job and beginning in earnest the program I had outlined for myself.

You see, those two years that I had spent in school had put something into my life from which I was never to escape. I do not mean textbooks and lectures alone; I mean, rather, the human contacts, the learning to know a kind of people so different from the sort of folk I had so far known. Those school experiences that came between my years of aimless drifting and the house party and artist crisis through which I had just passed were revealed to me now in a clearer light. They were more real and vital, even, than when I was living them. I had passed through those school experiences in a sort of dream. It had all been so different from anything I had ever known that I was dazed, as if I had suddenly landed in another world. Indeed, it was another world.

Now I was wide awake and looking back upon my

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dream. I could ask myself what it all meant. I saw those experiences in a clearer light. I understood the part they played in shaping me. Add to this feeling I now had about my school experience the fact that a certain young woman would be there for her second college year, and you will understand why I was driven to return to Hiram even though I knew I could stay for only a few hours. You boys met the young woman several years later; I need not tell you about her here, because probably you know her much better than I—as every boy should, better than anyone, know his mother.

I walked into the village about sundown. By chance I met one of my friends, a member of the faculty. He invited me to spend the night with him. I accepted. When I told him that I could not enter school that fall, he appeared surprised. I explained that I should drop out for a year and then return to continue my studies.

Was I decided about the ministry?

I explained my position.

There was a faculty meeting that evening, and I think you boys would like to have me tell you that when the faculty heard I was not to enter school that year they offered to pay my expenses if I would continue.

But the shame of my recent experience in living on other people's money made it impossible for me to accept. I said, "No." I must earn the money for my schooling. I would surely return the following year.

It was late in the afternoon when I said good-bye to the young woman you know as your mother, and struck

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out across country. I kept to the fields and woods so that I might not meet any of the students on their way to school. When I came to the railroad, I followed it toward the south. I spent that night in hell.

When it was dark I came to a place where the section crew had been burning old ties beside the way. The air was cold and the smoldering embers and the warm earth were hospitable. I had had no supper. I was not hungry. I did not try to sleep. As I crouched beside the fire, a thousand devils gathered round me in the darkness—Remorse and Fear and Loneliness and Despair and all their hosts. The task I had set for myself seemed so colossal. Why had I ever thought I could accomplish it? My father had been right: who was I to think that I could ever gain an education? What a fool I had been to turn my back on my friend and his offer of money! What insane notion had inspired me to refuse the offer made by the faculty? Where could I hope to earn, that winter, more than enough to keep soul and body together? I lived over my two years at school. I lived again the weeks of that house party at my friend's home. Painfully I retraced every step of the way I had come since mother's death and lived again that boyhood companionship with her. That night was an eternity. I have since known hours more trying, but I was young then and that night taxed to the limit my youthful capacity for mental suffering.

When morning came, in the first cold gray light, long before the sun was up, I started on. I did not know where. I was going. I did not care. Stiff and sore and emotionally

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exhausted, I must have been half delirious. I felt myself driven on, exactly as on that other occasion when I was aroused from my haystack bed and forced to hurry on to Cleveland as if to keep an appointment with some person to me unknown. Certainly I did not act of my own volition. I made no attempt to find food, but pushed on, following the railroad track. After a time it came to me that in a town somewhere to the south—I did not know how far nor exactly where—the evangelist through whom I had first been drawn to the teaching of Jesus was holding a meeting. I could not have said how I knew it. I did not, in fact, really know it at all. It came to me more as an impression. Of course I understand now that I must have heard about it and forgotten. I think that, half out of my mind as I was, I became possessed by the idea that I must get back to the beginning of my conception of life and living which I had first gained from this evangelist's presentation of the simple teaching of the Man of Galilee. In my bewildered brain the evangelist was associated with that beginning. I had made a sorry mess of all that I had so bravely set out to do. I must now get back to the beginning and start all over again.

How should I start again? What should I do? How make a new beginning? I had no thought about all that. I did not really think of anything. I was not, in fact, capable of thinking. I was capable only of feeling. I remember the interminable hours of that day as a hideous nightmare in which I struggled without conscious reasoning to escape from something not clearly defined but des-

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perately feared, to something as indefinite and most desperately needed.

It sounds half insane, doesn't it? But that is the way it was. I mean that is the best I can manage in trying to put it into words.

Please do not understand that in all this there was to me anything remotely like the customary orthodox religious interpretation of such experiences. The usual concepts such as "falling from grace," "returning to the fold," "repentance of sins," "seeking forgiveness," "the prodigal son," and all that, did not even occur to me. In the usual religious understanding of such experiences there was for me nothing religious about it. But nevertheless, my sons, I would have you know that to me now, after all these years, that experience was profoundly spiritual.

It was night again when I dragged myself into the little town of Lowellville in the Mahoning Valley. From the windows and the open door of a little country village church the light streamed out into the darkness, revealing the shadowy forms of horses, carriages, buggies, and farm wagons tied to a hitch rack, the fence, and near-by trees.

I went nearer and looked through the doorway which was at the end of the room opposite the pulpit. The evangelist was preaching. I remembered his sermon as one of that series to which I had listened at that other meeting, the tent meeting for which I had painted those banners that first set me to considering the teaching of Jesus. For a while I stood outside, listening. Then I slipped through the open door and into a seat in the back row.



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The people with whom the evangelist was staying invited me also to their home. They lived in the country and a part of their hilltop farm was a limestone quarry that helped to supply the smelters which in those times lighted the Mahoning Valley nights with the red glow of their furnaces.

Before going to bed we enjoyed a farm home supper of bread and milk with cold meat and cake. I wonder if my host and hostess ever knew how hungry I was. I would tell you the name of this good family, but to do so would only embarrass those who are still living, for I must write here that I have never in all my life known anyone who so fully and consistently lived the teachings of the Man of Galilee. There is no word in our language more abused, misunderstood and misapplied than the word "Christian." When in these after years I heard all sorts of hypocrites, charlatans, and crooks calling themselves and each other by this noblest of titles; when I have witnessed the sickening deeds of selfishness, injustice, intolerance, and downright cruelty that are committed in the name of Christianity, my mind has gone back to this simple country family and I have thanked God for the privilege of knowing real Christians.

The next day I was offered a job in the stone quarry.

You may take my word for it: quarrying limestone is hard work. There were no modern machines in this little quarry. It was all old-fashioned churn drilling by hand, sledge hammers, bars, and loading by main strength. The

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only machine we had was Old Kate, a big brown mare that hauled the cars to the head of the incline down which they traveled to the rock train on the railroad siding in the valley below.

We had breakfast before daylight and were on our "blocks" almost before we could see. From the "block" assigned to me I could look down upon the beautiful river-threaded valley and away to the other side where miles upon miles of farms, patterned in plowed fields and grass and orchards and pastures and woodlands, swept upward to the distant sky. A sunrise seen from my "block" in that quarry was something never to be forgotten.

We were paid by the ton. At first I could barely manage to quarry and load enough to make my board. But, even at that, I was happy. It was a long, long way from the home of my rich friends in Cleveland to this stone quarry—I do not mean in miles—and the distance between these new quarry friends of mine and those house-party friends was great. But the differences in material conditions were nothing compared with the difference in what might well be called my spiritual reaction to them. The satisfaction of feeling when I sat down to dinner that I was paying for my food with money I had earned by doing useful work; the feeling of independence in contrast to the humiliation of accepting alms from the most generous givers; the sense of pride in being a worker among workers instead of the shame of being a mere hanger-on among idlers; the glow of feeling oneself a part of life, not merely a useless parasite sucking an exist-

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ence from the lives of others. I was happy, I say, in that stone quarry. So happy that I have often wished circumstances or whatever it is that marked for me the way I must go had never taken me away from that hilltop and the friends I knew there.

And right here, if you boys will stand for it, I would like to preach a little: If I were "taking a text" it would be something like this: "Work, for the night is coming." The thought that I am moved to hammer into shape for your consideration is this: The one great mistake of our much overrated civilization is the modern idea that to be happy one must by some hook or crook be freed from the necessity of doing anything like work.

Through some devil's process our boasted "progress" seems to have brought us to this—that the one great end and aim of life is to achieve the privilege of living upon the work of others, and of doing nothing for ourselves or in return for what we receive.

If an honest, industrious mechanic, in an evil hour, invents some gadget that yields him in patent royalties a million dollars a year, we count him "successful" because with a million dollars' income he need no longer "slave at his trade." The value of his invention in terms of human well-being and happiness is not the measure of his success. Such values do not enter into our understanding. He need no longer work for his living! *That*, in our down-to-date wisdom, is his success. It is inconceivable to us that the mechanic might have known more real happi-

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ness in his little workshop than he has ever known in his million-dollar years.

If a simple farmer family happen to find themselves in an oil field and awake one morning millionaires, we cry, "halleluiah"; they will not need to work for a living now. The fact that the riches came purely through the chance location of their farm and not in any way as a return for their labor counts for nothing in our estimate of their success; nor can we imagine that with their millions of oil royalties they might sometimes wish that the farm home had never been disturbed. We have been educated by this shouting teacher "Progress" to the universal belief that to be unhappy with a million dollars not earned would be impossible.

If a bank clerk, a school-teacher, a telegraph operator, or any other useful citizen by some accident "cleans up" in a Wall Street gamble, we "point with pride" to the poor devil's success. "He can quit his job now; he no longer need work." The ideals held up before our children, in every way that ideals are impressed upon the young, are these: To get the most you can for the least you can give; the most successful in life are those who can compel the greatest number of their fellows to work for them. We seem almost to have reached the despicable height in culture where the word "workman" is the name of a lower order.

And I tell you, my sons, that just as surely as this mistaken concept of happiness without work has brought us to these days of fear, when no man with an honestly

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earned dollar is safe from the thugs and sharks who seek by force or trickery to take it away from him, just so surely will a night of horror come—unless we see to it that no man lives without working, and that we make work honorable in the sight of our children.

Our jobless millions are not jobless because there is no work to be done. They are victims of this mighty thing we call progress which exacts too great a profit from what the workers produce and which takes for every dollar's worth of productive service a thousand dollars for nothing but the exploitation and marketing of that service. Because so large a proportion of us are striving by any means, fair or foul, to live without work, we cannot as a nation feed ourselves, nor clothe ourselves, nor house ourselves, in decency. Hungry and naked and homeless, we wallow in the plenty of overproduction and suffer under the pitiless reign of corrupt politicians and the vice-lords of the underworld.

That this nation cannot endure with one half exploiting the other half is just as true as that it could not live half-slave and half-free. My generation has created this monstrous situation. It is up to your generation, my sons, to see to it that not only the jobless workers have back their God-ordained right to earn their livelihood, but that the do-nothings and shirkers and grafters who take to themselves the right to live without work earn their salt.

I find that I cannot conclude this bit of my book to you, my sons, without telling you about a visit I made to

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the old quarry some twenty years later. This time, I went by automobile from Cleveland. One of my old house-party friends accompanied me this time. He was my guest, and did we enjoy that trip! We stopped at Hiram for gas and went on to the scene of my quarry experience. As you may imagine, I found many changes in the hilltop scene. I found also that while the material scenes of life may change, life itself—or, as the legal gentlemen would put it, life “*per se*”—does not change. The kaleidoscope is turned and we see new patterns, but the pieces that form the pattern are always the same.

The old friends and fellow workmen of my quarry days were gone. The quarry itself had been enlarged and developed into a much more imposing institution. There was an entrance gate with a watchman, an office building with an air of imposing prosperity; a number of automobiles were parked in a place set apart for them; the driveway was nicely graveled, and there was a sign “Positively no Visitors allowed without a written permit.”

I entered the office. One of the men, with an air of authority, courteously favored me with his attention. “I would like permission to visit the quarry,” I said.

“Upon what grounds?” he asked.

Presenting my card, I answered: “Upon the grounds that I once worked here.”

He glanced at the card and laughed: “I should say you could have permission to visit this quarry! You are one of the traditions of the place.”

He called the others, and the reception they gave me,

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then and there, warmed my heart. They wanted to guide me to their new "extension," but I said: "No, please. I'd like to go alone. Just give me the permit in case anyone is moved to run me off the premises and let me find my own way around."

I think they caught a little of what was going on inside me, because one of them called after me: "You'll find the old workings over that way."

It was well that he directed me, for I did not know which way to go, the workings had been so extended and the whole contour of the hilltop so changed. There were all kinds of machinery now: engines and derricks and drills. There was a railroad with a locomotive taking the place of our old brown mare, Kate. But I finally found the older section from which the rock had long since been quarried and after some exploring I stood on the spot where once my "block" had been.

I cannot tell you all I felt as I remembered those days and the years that followed them. With the flood of memories that swept over me there was a queer feeling of bewilderment and wonder, as when one awakens suddenly amid strange surroundings. What did it all mean? How had it happened? Who had taken the tools of the quarry out of my hands and decreed that I should labor with the drill and sledge hammer and bar of a writer? Who had assigned me to this "block" in the quarry where I now work?

Did the smelters, wherein the raw material of all our ideas must be treated, and from which come the iron and

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steel of our human building—did this smelter really need the tiny fragments of thought that I could quarry? What foolishness! And yet somewhere today those bits of limestone that I quarried from my “block” in that old hill-top quarry are in the iron and steel of our material structures. Perhaps it will be given me to blast and pry and sledge, from my “block” in this quarry where I now work, a little thought or two for the great Smelter. It is all work, my sons, believe me; it is all work.

The gentlemen at the office seemed a little disappointed because I did not visit their new extensions. I could see that they were very proud of their improvements, as they well might be. I did not, of course, tell them my thoughts. That year I wrote “Helen of the Old House.”

Certainly at the time of my quarry experience I had not planned to be a writer. My mind was set on returning to school. Beyond that, as I have said, I had nothing definitely in view. Then, suddenly, the kaleidoscope was turned again and I found myself caught in a totally different pattern.

It was midwinter. I received a letter from Toledo offering me the position of advance agent for an entertainer of some reputation. In those days—so long before motion pictures and automobiles and radios—concerts, recitals, entertainers, and lecturers earned considerable money, and the offer promised to pay me much better than quarrying limestone. With high hopes of school the following year, I accepted.



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As a salesman of high-class entertainment I was a wretched failure. I doubt if in all the world there could have been found a person less fitted than I for such a job. Certainly no one could have failed more completely. What was worse, the effect upon me was devastating. The sudden change from happiness and peace and contentment of the stone quarry with its hard work and glowing health, the thrilling beauty of my hilltop view and the unpretentious Christian genuineness of my country friends, to this hectic, scrambling catch-as-catch-can life sunk me fathoms deep in gloom. I hated everything about this so-called work. I detested the entertainers I tried to book. I loathed the people I contacted in trying to sell my wares. The super-refined, ultra-artistic programs of sublimated slush which I tried to peddle were so nauseating to me that I simply could not go through with it.

Oh, indeed it was all most "high class," I assure you. My entertainers were most worthy people. I dealt only with Culture Clubs, Church Societies, and similar organizations whose aims were the highest and who stood in their communities for all that was elevating. It was not the business that was at fault; it was I. I guess my limestone quarry work had been too solid and substantial and real. When I churned a hole in the blue rock with my twenty-pound drill, or pounded away with my heavy sledge hammer or heaved a chunk of rock into the car, *that was* something. I could take hold of that job. I could feel the weight of it. But this selling entertainment, this chin-chin and palaver and heavy talk about nothing—

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whew! My insides turn over yet when I think of it. Even my experiences peddling cider vinegar and selling furniture polish are happier memories.

I escaped by contracting a severe cold which developed into pneumonia. I nearly managed to escape out of this world for good and all, which in my state of mind at that time would have been highly satisfactory to me.

When I was able to leave my bed, the doctor informed me proudly that he had never known a case as severe as mine to recover. He said that had I not been as tough as a knot (score again for the stone quarry), and blessed with a most remarkable constitution, I could never have pulled through. When I told him I must get to work, because I was planning to go to school the next fall, he shook his head. Gravely he warned me that it would be several months before I was out of danger and fit for work of any kind. I must take things easy and not worry about school. I was lucky to be alive. All of which was small comfort to me. The only good I could find in the situation was that I had lost my job.

I returned to Lowellville and my stone quarry friends, a sadder and a wiser young man. If I had not fully decided what my life work was to be, I at least knew definitely, with no "ifs" or "ands" or reservations of any sort, what it would *not* be. And that was about all I got out of that entertainment managing experience. Perhaps it was enough.

While convalescing I painted a picture. It was not much of a picture, but some good people thought it was and I

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was careful not to belittle their judgment. I painted more pictures. I was not strong enough to do anything else. My success, small as it was, encouraged me to work harder.

Now, it so happened that at this time the boys and young men of Lowellville were causing their parents considerable anxiety. They were a fine crop of youngsters, but there was nothing in the way of Boy Scouts, Y.M.C.A. or such organizations to counteract the influence of a small but tough town atmosphere and . . . well, you know. So a number of parents got together and talked the situation over. Being looked upon as somewhat of an expert on the evils which threaten the young, I was called in consultation. As a result I organized and conducted a sort of boys' club, with reading-room, games, drills, and gymnasium work—enough to keep my patients interested and to work off their surplus steam.

I enjoyed this work. I felt that in a small way I was being useful. With this, I continued working at my pictures, which, curiously enough, found buyers. At night, after the evening with my club boys, I studied as long as I could keep awake. When a Hiram friend, a member of the faculty, came to see how I was getting on, I told him that I should be able to enter school that fall.

Then one day as I sat at my easel a gray mist, a sort of filmy veil, came between me and the canvas. My eyes had been hurting me for some time, but I had thought nothing of that. I took my sketch-book and went for the rest of the day into the country. The next morning after I

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had worked an hour or two, that same gray veil settled down between my eyes and the canvas.

I went to an eye doctor. He looked into my eyes with a lot of lights and things and demanded to know what I had been doing. I told him.

He said, "H'm-m-m-m."

He gave me something to put in my eyes, told me not to use them, and to come back to him two or three days later.

When I saw him again he said: "You must give up all thought of painting or reading, for several months."

"But, I can't stop work. I am going to school this fall."

Gravely he handed me an open book and asked me to read a passage to him. I saw the printed page as a series of gray lines. I could not distinguish a single word. "It will be many months before you can see to read," said the doctor.

I went back to my little studio. With every bit of will power I could command I sat down to my painting. When in spite of all my straining effort that gray veil refused to lift and I realized that it was no use to try, I turned to and smashed everything I could get my hands on. The next day they shut me up in a dark room, with my eyes bandaged. They even plugged the keyhole lest a tiny ray of light enter. I think I would have gone mad had not a musical friend loaned me his cornet. I spent hours trying to blow "Go Tell Aunt Rodie" out of the darned thing. It must have been terrible for the neighbors, but I honestly believe it saved me.

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And that, as you boys know, is the extent of my musical education. I cannot enjoy Grand Opera, but I still have a sneaking fondness for "Aunt Rodie" and her old gray goose.

When they released me from my dark prison they banded my eyes with several folds of black crêpe. I saw objects as in the twilight. I could distinguish a human being from a horse or a cow because the man or woman appeared as a perpendicular object and the animal horizontal.

Mostly I sat very still and wondered what I was going to do.

Gradually they removed the black crêpe bandages, a layer at a time, until I could bear the light and could see fairly well. But, still, I could not read a line.

I believed, now, that the oculist was right in saying that I would not return to school that fall.

I never did return. With the close of my second preparatory year my so-called college career was forever ended. So far as acquiring scholarship in any established institution of learning, I was a hopeless failure.

I have often wondered what would have been the final outcome had I been permitted to carry out my ambitious educational program. Would I have held through colleges and universities my ideal of service? Or would I have lost my way in a wilderness of textbooks and lectures, and finally, out of touch with life, been content to

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live within the circle of my own individual intellectual interests?

The passion for learning, with no accompanying purpose to use the knowledge acquired, is a strange thing. It is kin to the passion of the miser who hoards all the gold he can clutch and dies in filthy poverty. Money is wealth only when it is richly used. Knowledge unapplied to living is as useless as the dusty and forgotten volumes hidden away in the attic. The poor devil who is caught in the grip of an inordinate appetite for learning without a governing purpose is lost. Day and night he is beset with longings for wisdom which will not be denied. He is textbook ridden to his miserable earthly end.

Have you never observed the sad victims of this pernicious educational habit? They sacrifice their very lives to gratify their desires. It seems not to matter in the least what they learn, or why. In a sort of religious frenzy they strive for degrees upon degrees and more degrees, all to no purpose, until at last they are tumbled into their scholarly graves with sighs of relief by those who suffered for their too much learning and too little living. (Better a hoe in the hands of one who will use it to cultivate a field of vegetables or weed a bed of flowers, I say, than a university course acquired at somebody's expense by one who has no use for it.)

Of course if one is so fashioned by nature and a pair of unfortunate parents that one can be nothing but an ornament, then by all means let us hitch our taxes up another notch and make the poor prune as ornamental as

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teachers and textbooks and societies can make him. This seems to be the place for me to remark, too, that of all the pestiferous insects that annoy mortal flesh, the educational snob is the most detestable.

I am privileged, thank God, to count among my friends many college and university trained men, even a few presidents of educational institutions, and I assert here my veneration of these true, educationally equipped, intellectual workers. But in proportion to my admiration and love for these useful scholars I despise the snobbish drones who base their claims to intellectual superiority upon the mere fact that they went to college. A sheepskin in itself never entitled anyone to a degree of respect beyond that accorded the humble but useful animal who first carried it. A university degree is not a favor, it is a responsibility. It is not a gift, it is a debt. It is honorable only as it is honorably lived up to. The use one makes of one's education—that is the measure of respect to which the graduate is entitled. My observation is that the higher one has himself climbed up the educational ladder, the less that one is inclined to look down upon those who are usefully busy below.

Perhaps you boys will understand now why I began telling you before you were graduated from your cradles that I cared not a rap what you did in life if only it was a useful thing to do, but that the one thing you could not be was to be useless.

Now that I have that out of the old system, and thanking you for your patience, I should like to have you know

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how desperately I have regretted my lack of an education. Sometimes when I have remarked this, charitably inclined friends have said: "Oh, but you are educated, even though you did not go to college."

Well, yes; in a way, perhaps. It is also true that any old suit of clothes will serve to dress me in a fashion to keep me out of jail. But, after all, a hand-me-down does not bear the label of a first-class tailor. I am casting no reflections on the ready-to-wear merchants; you know what I mean.

There is, in truth, never a workday that I do not feel the handicap of my lack of school training. I perform my allotted task in a bungling, uncertain, left-handed way. I have in my work no feeling of sureness. I do not know enough grammar. I cannot spell. My vocabulary is inadequate. I am not even well enough acquainted with the words I use. I lose too much time fumbling around, stumbling over things, trying this and experimenting with that. I should be able to think straight and clear to a given mark; to write the way I shoot, with a satisfying certainty, whether the bullet hits the target or not.

To me, history is a jig-saw puzzle with half the pieces lost. Mathematics is an unholy mystery. Philosophy is something educated people talk about in words which for me have no meaning. Languages are as far above my comprehension as the music of the spheres. I know there is such a thing as grammar, because I once heard about it. My memory has never been trained except to forget. Names, dates, and figures pass through my mind as



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through a sieve. I study, but I do not know how to study. My thinking is a mental rough-and-tumble.

In my efforts to write, I feel like a watchmaker who has no tools but a monkey wrench and a machine hammer and who knows darned little about the insides of a watch. As a college professor, who taught Greek, once wrote me: "You need to perfect yourself in the art of carpentry and joinery so as to blend foreground and background into one harmonious whole." I am quite sure that the learned professor's diagnosis of my case is correct, but I confess I have an uneasy feeling that, as a gem of scholarly English, his prescription for what ails me is a bit cockeyed. Perhaps had I studied Greek I should be more confident.

In conversation with educated persons it is the same. I get all hot and bothered. I say "don't" for "doesn't"; "will" for "shall"; split infinitives from stem to stern; scatter mispronunciations right and left; and use barnyard expressions galore. I know that I do it, but I can't learn how not to.

Really, one who has written as many books as I have should be able to think, and talk, and act, like an author. Above all, he should be able to write like an author. All of which I feel I might do if only I were educated. As it is, I understand exactly why an old backwoodsman in the Ozark Mountains once said of me: "Wal, I'll be doggoned! If I war a goin' out inter the bresh to shoot a book feller, I'd sure never take a crack at him."

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## XI

YOU BOYS WILL UNDERSTAND, OF COURSE, THAT THE thoughts on education with which I closed the preceding chapter did not come to me at that time when blindness so rudely slammed in my face the door to a college career. As you may imagine, under the stress of my great disappointment, I was incapable of thinking. Not only had my physical eyes failed; my spiritual vision, too, was lost. I could see a little with my physical eyes; my spiritual sight was utterly gone. The light which had been leading me was out. There was no gleam anywhere. I sat in total darkness.

You see, I had been so obsessed with my purpose to fit myself for a *great* service, that I was incapable in that hour of reflecting that there might somewhere still be a place for me.

Those familiar devils of not being wanted besieged me now in force. Life itself seemed not to want me. Once again I was ordered to move on, to go somewhere else. I withdrew deep into myself, trying to hide from all human touch. I wanted only to be in my darkness alone. I hated people for their kindly interest in my affairs. I felt as I imagine a wounded animal feels when it crawls away to hide. Not an admirable state of mind for anyone.

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One morning I went down to the river. For a long time I sat on a ledge of rock a few feet above the water, overlooking the stream. I tried to think, but my mind refused to function. I seemed to be on the brink of a vast space in which there was nothing but a thick, dull, gray fog.

That stretch of river was broad and quiet, and fringed with giant trees which leaned far out from the bank as if to look at themselves in the mirror-like surface. Beneath their overhanging limbs the shadows were cool and still. I had sketched that bit of water with the trees and shadows many times, but I could not see it very well, now. I felt, rather than watched, the slow current as it slipped with scarce a ripple past the rock where I sat. The river seemed so sure of itself, so untroubled, so eternally at peace as it moved with steady measured flow upon its appointed way.

I wondered how it would seem to slip down from my rock into the quiet water and become a part of the calm, untroubled stream. Why not? There was not a soul on earth in whose life my passing would make the slightest ripple. It would matter to the world no more than it would be noticed by the river. The world that knew me would continue to go its way as undisturbed as the river would continue to flow toward the distant sea. It would be as if I had never existed.

It was the only time in my life that I ever permitted myself such thoughts. But, then, it was the only time in my life when I seemed to be facing so hopelessly . . . nothing. I have since known hours when it seemed that ill-health and worse would overwhelm me, but in these

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later years I have had my work. And (I say it humbly), work has been my salvation.

I wondered: Did the river know where it was going, that it swept on its way with such seeming purpose?

Where was it going?

My thought followed the waters. Down the Mahoning Valley into the Beaver; past Beaver Falls and into the Ohio; down the Ohio into the Mississippi; down the Mississippi to the Gulf of Mexico and the ocean. I threw a stick into the current and watched it drift out of my sight. There would be steamboats on the Ohio and Mississippi. There would be ships where the waters that were flowing past me reached the sea.

I was startled out of my foolish mood by a sudden thought. Why not build a canoe and follow the water? The cost would be easily within my reach. I could not continue staying on in idleness where I was. The doctor said I must not undertake heavy work. Such a vagabond journey would be sure to yield some sort of adventure. It would be something besides my own wretchedness to occupy my mind. Anything might happen on such a trip. Who cared what happened, anyway? I could not get myself into a worse fix than I was.

That afternoon I planned a canoe and ascertained the costs. The next morning I began building it. While I worked on the tiny craft that was to carry me and my camp outfit down so many hundreds of miles of river, my plans, too, assumed more definite shape.

As I have said, about the time I left my father and

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before I disappeared from the city where he was then living, my brother Will went to Missouri to work for a farmer uncle. A year or more later, father followed his eldest son to the West. He was living somewhere in Missouri when Will died. After my illness, of which they heard from Auntie Sue, Uncle Ben and his family, whom I had never seen, wrote to me inviting me to visit them. They had been very fond of Brother Will. But at the time the invitation came I was looking forward to returning to school and could not think of accepting.

Now, with my school plans hopelessly wrecked, with no plans of any sort for the future, and with my canoeing venture taking me in that direction, it was natural that I should think of Uncle Ben's invitation, and of my father. They were my people. In my mental condition I wanted to feel a human tie that was closer than mere friendship. I determined then that when I reached the end of my canoe voyage I would go on to Missouri. I wrote my uncle and he and my aunt cordially repeated their invitation. My father too wrote, urging me to come.

There is much that I might write of that canoe voyage down the rivers. There were thrilling moments in swift water; and a cyclone which I narrowly escaped. There was an attempted hold-up by river thugs and a time when I joined forces with an old river-rat on his drifting shanty-boat. There was the incident of the captain and crew of a steamboat when I was robbed, and a most interesting experience in Huntington. But such adventures have no place

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in the scheme of this book I am writing for you boys. They mean nothing to me now as I look back. They were passing incidents of no importance, which contributed little or nothing toward the final settling of my life. I mention this canoe trip only because, all unguessed by me, my tiny ship, in which I had ventured with no thought but of escaping from myself, was all the while bearing me nearer and nearer to an incident that was a crucial event in shaping my course to the ultimate work of my life.

Following a flood period, the lower Ohio was in such a condition that fever was almost a certainty if I continued. I shipped my canoe back to her home port and continued from Cincinnati by rail. Father was not at Springfield when I arrived. He was building a house for another uncle, the husband of his sister, who owned a farm farther south in the Ozarks. But Uncle Ben and his family gave me a hearty welcome. They were drawn to me, I think, by their love for my brother and they made me feel at home.

When, later, I met my father, I found that he had not changed from the time I had last seen him in that Ohio city.

It was during this visit to Uncle Ben and his family that I first saw the backwoods of the Ozark Mountains. A farmer neighbor with whom I became acquainted invited me to go with him on a camping and fishing trip to the mouth of the James River, which empties into the White. We traveled by mule team and wagon, stopping beside

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the road when night overtook us. As we entered deeper and deeper into the Ozark wilderness, the beauty of the wooded hills, bright little valleys, and clear running streams, entered my soul. The natives, living in log cabins and farming a few acres of hillside, with their primitive customs and quaint homely philosophies, gripped me with intriguing interest. I did not dream then what they would, later mean to me.

Father finished the farmhouse he had been building that summer for Uncle Charlie and in the fall I painted it. This farm was beautifully located in a little valley in what was known as the White Oak district. It was on the very edge of the wilderness and I was thus brought in closer touch with the scenes and the native life of the Ozarks.

I now began working at my pictures again, using my eyes a little every day and stopping as soon as they hurt me. I read nothing, saving my eyes for my painting. Gradually I extended the working time from a half-hour to an hour and then to two or three. I was able to finish two pictures. I had just enough money left, almost to a penny, to ship these two pictures east. You may imagine my long breath of relief when the check in payment for them reached me.

I continued painting in that Ozark country and of course became better and better acquainted with the backwoods folk of the region. My uncle and aunt were devout Congregationalists and attended services at the nearest town, some fourteen miles away to the north. Southward

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from the farm the mountain wilderness stretched away, mile upon mile, thinly settled with small crudely cultivated clearings on the creek bottoms, and log houses with now and then a rude schoolhouse or backwoods store. The only church services held in this region were conducted at rare intervals in schoolhouses, brush arbors, or under the trees, by wandering native preachers who, whatever intellectual or spiritual qualifications they lacked, were invariably strong on some fearful and wonderful denominational doctrine.

When word went round the countryside that such a meeting was to be held at "early candle lightin'" in a schoolhouse some four miles away, I determined to go. It was a beautiful evening and there would be a moon, so I walked.

The tiny schoolhouse was packed with backwoods people who had come, some of them many miles through the wilderness, to hear the word of God. They came from their log-cabin homes on horse or mule back, in farm wagons, or on foot, following dimly marked trails through the forests over the hills and across the creeks. They were poorly dressed—the men in hickory shirts and blue jeans, the women in mother hubbards. They were a thin, stringy, hard-eyed people, and until one became known to them they were wary and suspicious. I doubt if there was a man in that audience who was not armed with gun or knife or both. And yet in spite of their forbidding, suspicious, and furtive demeanor, I knew there were many kindly hearts and I was sure that I could see in their



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lean hard faces a look of hunger—a vague, shadowy, wistful hunger for that which is more than meat.

The services began with a “spell o’ singin’.” There were no books, no instrument. Even to my unmusical ears the high-pitched, wailing discordant noise the preacher called a hymn, was painful.

At last the preacher announced his text. Imagine my consternation when he read from one of the most wonderful lessons Jesus ever gave to men: “Ye are the salt of the earth and the salt hath lost its *Saviour*.” I was shocked beyond expression.

Those poor spiritually hungry backwoods people had come to that meeting to be fed. The man who had invited them held in his hand the Book which contained the greatest spiritual food the world has ever known. Those people were dependent upon him. They were waiting, with breathless interest, for his message. And the preacher himself was incapable even of so much as *reading* the words of Jesus. If this one who proposed to present to them the teaching of Jesus could not distinguish between “savor” and “Saviour,” what chance had they of receiving from his lips the truths carried in the Master’s own words?

The preacher began his sermon. “Now, brethren and sisters, yo-all air the salt of this hyer yearth and yo-all has done crucified yo’ Saviour.”

For two hours that representative of the Lord spoke with authority which I alone of all his hearers could question. He thundered at them the most horrible conglomer-

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ation imaginable of misquotations, with confused, involved, and impossible interpretations of the simple utterances of Jesus. His weird and terrible doctrines of hell-fire and damnation, starry crowns and golden streets, blood and sacrifice, were revolting. To me, it was profane. I burned with shame that in a Christian country such things could be; and that, too, in the name of Jesus whose simple eternal truths meant so much to me.

As I walked home that night through the moonlit woods I pondered over what I had seen and heard. I said to myself: "You have had practically no school training; you know very little of anything, and nothing at all of theology, but you can at least *read* what Jesus said. Might it not be possible for you to do something for these people?"

Thanksgiving was to be observed in the White Oak district with an all-day meeting at a schoolhouse not far from my uncle's home. The neighbors would bring baskets of food and there would be a community Thanksgiving dinner. A preacher was coming to hold services.

At the last minute we learned that, for some reason, the preacher could not come.

A long, lean hill-billy approached me. "You got education, mister. Why cain't you preach for we-uns?"

I answered impulsively, "I reckon I can."

And that, my sons, although I did not at the time know it, was the exact moment when I entered the ministry. The job had found me.

I chose for my theme the simple thought that a true

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spirit of Thanksgiving would lead one to use the gifts for which one gave thanks as the Giver intended they should be used. I applied right there in the White Oak district what I had to say. One comment reported to me was gratifying: "He's got larnin', all right, but he sho' talks so's we-uns kin understand what he's a-meanin'."

At the close of my talk I surprised myself by asking the audience: "How many of you folks will come here every Sunday to hear this sort of preaching? I shall not say a word about any of the denominational doctrines. I do not know much about them; but if I knew all there is to know, I wouldn't preach them. You do not even know what church I belong to. I shall never tell you. My proposition is simply that we come together to worship God and to learn the plain, simple truths that Jesus taught, in order that we may apply them to ourselves and live them."

Without an exception the audience signified that they were for it.

"All right," I announced. "There will be preaching here next Sunday."

The school trustees were willing that I should use the schoolhouse, but they warned me that I should not be permitted to hold many meetings there. Every preacher who had tried it, they said, had been run out of the country by a crowd of toughs. These backwoods gangsters would come in force, break up the meeting in the middle of the sermon, whip the preacher, and throw him out.

All that winter I preached in that little backwoods

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schoolhouse. I was my own official church board, my own janitor, and my own paymaster, and I never thought of taking up a collection. Oh yes, that tough crowd tried it with me. And the funny part of that experience is that when they failed, those same hill-billy hoodlums became my warmest friends. They used to come to "preachin'" on horseback. Every man packed a gun and when the services were over they would hang around to shake hands with me and exchange a few words of good-natured chaff. Then, mounting their horses, they would disappear into the surrounding forest at a tearing run, firing their guns and whooping like fiends.

Christmas Eve there were "doin's" at the schoolhouse. A tiny four-year-old girl was reciting a Christmas poem when a half-drunken bully, a stranger, stood up on a bench and swinging a six-gun at his hip dared anybody to fight.

No one moved.

Glaring about, the belligerent one caught sight of me standing with my back to the rear wall of the room. The crowd politely made a lane through which he approached. Slapping his hand down on my shoulder, he shouted: "Me an' this hyer man'll whup any three men in the crowd."

Was I scared! I'm scared yet when I think about it.

I was saved from this ferocious eater of raw meat by my same tough citizen friends who had been so confidently relied upon to run me out. All of which goes to prove that in preaching, as in everything else, the unexpected is the only thing one can bank on without a chance of losing.

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When people became so interested in the life and words of Jesus that there were not Sundays enough, we held a sort of school every Friday night.

One midwinter evening there was a terrific storm—sleet and snow and stinging wind. Surely, I thought, nobody would be foolhardy enough to venture out in such weather.

The evening was well advanced when we were startled by a loud knocking at the door. I opened the door to find a stalwart young backwoodsman standing there in the storm.

“Come in,” I cried.

He did not move. “What’s the matter? Ain’t thar goin’ to be no meetin’ tonight?”

I stammered some sort of reply.

“Sho’ we-uns air all thar. We got a fire built an’ air a waitin’. We ’lowed as how mebbly you war sick.”

We sure held meetin’ that night, and you may believe that, fair weather or foul, I was never again behind time at the appointed hour of “early candle lightin’.”

What did it all amount to? How do I know? How does anyone know? After it was all over and I had gone on my way, I received letters telling me that three of those young backwoodsmen had gone out of the wilderness to attend school. I am not convinced that it is up to me to judge what it all amounted to.

When I left the White Oak district that spring I went

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to Mount Vernon, a beautiful country village in southwest Missouri.

I continued painting—or perhaps I should say trying to paint—landscapes. But my backwoods preaching followed me and I was frequently asked to spend Sunday in various country districts and talk to the people who were too poor to afford a regular preacher. With my own individual philosophy of life—namely, that life was worth the effort only as one made whatever contribution lay within one's ability toward the more abundant living of all, and believing that the simple presentation of Jesus's teaching lay within my power, I could not refuse these invitations. Mostly they were in schoolhouses or half-abandoned churches in out-of-the-way country districts.

Then I was asked to go to Pierce City.

Pierce City was a sizable town, as towns in southern Missouri go. There were several churches of as many denominations struggling for existence. One good auditorium could have accommodated the entire church-going population of the community. The church that invited me was a pitifully small congregation of the Disciples. They owned a tiny building, but were too poor to employ a regular pastor. To close the doors of their unnecessary house and join other Christians in worship would, in their understanding of Christianity, have been an anti-Christian thing to do. Preachers who preached for nothing were not too plentiful, and the brethren, I suppose, felt that their opportunity was not to be neglected.

They asked me to come again the following Sunday. I

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went. They asked me to come the third time. I went. This continued all summer. I made the trip on horseback, twenty-five miles, returning to Mount Vernon and my work Sunday night after the evening service.

For some reason the attendance increased until I came to expect a full house, and the congregation was chiefly composed of young men and women. I had reason to believe that my services as a preacher were not wholly without value, particularly to the young men. That is why I continued my fifty-mile horseback ride every week-end.

That fall the Pierce City Christian Church formally asked me to become their pastor. They *thought* they could manage to pay me eight dollars per week.

I had now to make a definite decision. Should I continue my painting, which I thoroughly enjoyed and which was not without promise, or should I put this work aside to become a preacher in a poverty-stricken church in a country village?

It was those young people who decided the question for me. Those old dyed-in-the-wool, doctrine-hardened Disciples, so set in their views and so established in their denominationalism, were away beyond me. They knew more about their peculiar doctrines which separated them from all other Christians than I should ever know. I suspect they even knew things about their denominational tenets that Jesus Himself never dreamed of. But those young men and women of the village, who for some reason seemed to receive in a most responsive spirit what I had to offer, those young people, were different. If I

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was to be at all true to my own convictions—that with the best of one's ability one must render that service which will most effectually count for the better living of all—I could not refuse this opportunity which had presented itself. I could not believe that any work I might in time accomplish as an artist could compare in value with the influence I could exert by direct contact with these young people. I became the pastor of the Pierce City Christian Church.

I should give you here, I think, a general idea of the place I occupied among the regular professional ecclesiastics. As I have told you, after that first year of my disillusionment at Hiram College, I never deliberately, with malice aforethought, set out to be a preacher. I did not seek this job with the Pierce City Church; the job found me.

I was of course without training of any sort for the pulpit. I was not recommended or licensed by any general official church board or governing body other than that of the local congregation. I never asked anyone if I might preach. No higher-ups authorized or appointed me. This situation was possible because the Christian Church is congregational in government and theoretically, at least, is not under the control of any bishop, church official, or central board of any sort. And, I must confess, there were occasions during the years I spent in this work when I had reason to suspect that I was not entirely acceptable



to the clergy as a whole. I may add, candidly, that the clergy as a whole were never entirely acceptable to me.

Of course from their point of view, the reverend gentlemen were right. Considering my general unfitness for the profession by any recognized standard of college and seminary preparation, it was hardly to be expected that they would look upon me as one of the regular cloth. My limited views of what constituted Christianity were sadly lacking in certain features which they held to be the essentials of the Faith. Nor were the clergy alone in this attitude of accepting me with reservations. There were wise old denominational elders who listened to my peculiar brand of preaching with somewhat pained expressions. I used to think sometimes that a few of those brethren who so staunchly upheld the faith committed to them by the denominational fathers, prayed for my success with their fingers crossed. It was not so much the things I said in my preaching that troubled them; it was rather the things I did not say. I placed the emphasis upon the wrong words.

I wore no distinctive garb. I abhorred being called "reverend." I refused to take advantage of clergy credentials and half-fare rates, ten per cent off, and all other forms of special privilege which the professionals claim as their rights. I said what I believed to be true about preachers and preaching as frankly as I voiced my convictions as to denominational Christianity. My boyhood experience with "Pure Cider Vinegar Christianity" made me shy of piety that was too glibly expressed in public. I could not believe

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that the Lord was invariably in the wind. Perhaps I said so sometimes when I might better have held my breath. On the whole, I must have been something of an irregular and presumptuous thorn in the flesh of the body ministerial. And somewhat of an annoyance to the denominational purists.

Near the end of my second year at Pierce City I was invited to visit the church at Pittsburg, Kansas. At that time the population of Pittsburg was about fifteen thousand. It was in the heart of a coal-mining district and a railroad center, with extensive railroad shops.

There were fourteen denominational churches and not a place except saloons, gambling houses, and houses of prostitution where a man might spend a leisure hour. Saloons in a prohibition Kansas city? Yes, twenty-three of them—not blind but wide open, with beer signs at the entrance, swinging doors, bar and everything. Beer wagons drove openly through the streets. Altogether it was a city in which the life I had known so intimately, when I cooked for those rig-builders in the oil fields, abounded. I felt that whatever my lack of technical training for the pulpit, I was peculiarly fitted to serve this community. I did not know theology, but I understood the language of those shop workers and miners. I knew that this was my job.

I had no illusions about this work which in due course of time I undertook in Pittsburg. I knew that here, if anywhere in the world, I must work out my ideas of what

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I called "applied Christianity." There were reasons why this Pittsburg church was ideal for the—shall I say—"experiment"?

I purposed simply that the church should meet the spiritual needs of the community with something more than forty minutes of good advice from the pulpit once a week. In my plans the Ladies' Aid Societies and kindred church organizations, which labored with every conceivable scheme, from ice-cream sociables to autographed bedspreads, to make money for the running expenses of the church, should be abolished. In their stead, I proposed the church should engage in social activities for the sole purpose of contacting the young life of the city and that the Ladies' Aid should busy themselves with making garments for the poor. My pet argument to the membership was this: "If your church and your religion means to you as much as you say it does, then you should be glad to pay for it. To offer salvation to a sinner while asking him to pay for a dish of ice cream, in order to save you the cost of the blessings you enjoy, is an insult to the sinner's intelligence and shames the name of Him you profess to serve."

I visioned a church that would never close its doors, night or day. A church with social parlors, and reading-rooms, and all that. I wanted to make it a home for the homeless, a refuge for those who needed a safe harbor. You see, I could not look upon this job of being pastor of the Christian Church in Pittsburg, Kansas, from the ecclesiastical point of view nor from the viewpoint of the

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saved and safe pillars of the congregation. I saw it, not from the secure and comfortable inside, but from the outside. Having been one of those outsiders myself, I felt that I knew what was needed.

Well, we got along. The old weather-beaten, dilapidated and soot-grimed church building needed repainting. I pulled on my overalls and helped to paint her. There were criticisms from the ministerial union and some of the self-elected guardians of the Faith were uncomfortable. But the congregation as a whole and the public heartily approved. With the money-making activities abolished, our treasurer still was able to report all bills paid and a respectable balance in the bank. But still I did not seem to be making the progress I desired toward the materialization of my vision of applied Christianity. Then I hit on an idea, which, as it happened, led me eventually from this work with the church to the work that was to occupy me all the remaining years of my life.

I remember as if it were yesterday when the idea first struck me.

It was late one Sunday night, after I had returned home from church and was preparing for bed. I was feeling low, as I always did after preaching. With my mind still occupied with what I had tried to put over in my sermon, and brooding over what I felt to be my failure, I pulled off one shoe and—the big idea exploded.

"I know what I'll do," I said aloud. "I'll write a story; I'll picture the actual condition here in Pittsburg, together

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with the church, the church officials, and the preachers of the other churches. I'll make it all as true to life as I can draw it."

The big idea being that I would set forth the attitude of what I called "churchanity" in contrast to the teachings of Jesus or Christianity. And that I would meet the situation in my story, which was the situation in Pittsburgh, as I hoped the church of which I was pastor would meet it.

I had no thought of offering this proposed story to a publisher: nothing like that ever entered my head. My idea was to read the story to my congregation on the installment plan. No doubt I was influenced in this by Charles M. Sheldon and his book "In His Steps." Nothing could have been farther from my thoughts than that this story was to be the beginning of my work as a writer.

I was by now speaking somewhere nearly every evening in the week and three times each Sunday, which, with other church duties, kept me fairly busy. I wrote my story of "Applied Christianity" after ten o'clock at night.

When it was at last finished I submitted the manuscript to a few church friends who were in full sympathy with the work I was trying to accomplish. This advisory board included members of other churches, non-church members, and one regular clergyman. I wanted their criticisms and suggestions before reading the story to the congregation as I had planned. It was the clergyman, the pastor of a rival denomination, who first suggested that the story should be offered to a publisher. The other mem-

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bers of my advisory board concurred in his opinion. At first I was definitely against it, but they argued that to publish the book would not lessen the influence of the story upon my own congregation, and the message, they felt, should have a much wider hearing. I was finally persuaded, but felt a little disappointed at this change in my original plan and very doubtful as to the outcome.

I was advised by a certain publishing house that they would bring out the book provided the story was first published as a serial in some magazine. They suggested that I offer it to the *Christian Century*, a denominational paper. I did so and it was accepted.

And *then*, oh then, I had my first encounter with the editorial shears! The things that *Christian Century* editor did to my poor little story of "Applied Christianity" were, to me, shameful. When I ventured a protest, he said (I give you his very words): "But my dear boy, you do not understand, you have used a camera in picturing life, when you should have used your brushes and idealized. Your drunken men actually stagger. Our readers do not like to see such things."

He then proceeded to eliminate not only the "camera studies" but most of my carefully planned and dearly cherished ideas of church work as well. This editorial policy of protecting the Christian readers of the *Christian Century* did more than stagger me; it knocked me cold. So far as I could see, there was no hope, now, of ever using this story to sell my idea of "Applied Christianity" to the church at Pittsburg or anywhere else. My congre-

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gation, of course, was reading this emasculated, refined, sterilized, denominationally pure and sweet version as it appeared in the church paper. For me to read the original manuscript to them with any hope of holding their attention was now impossible. I was so completely down and out that I abandoned all thought of the book. The least I could do, it seemed, was to save myself from perpetuating the horror. So I hid the poor mutilated corpse in the bottom of the least used drawer of my desk and turned to other things. I had nearly succeeded in forgetting it when, one fine summer day, Doctor Williams dropped in at my study in the church.

If Doctor William Williams, affectionately known to all Pittsburg and the country for miles around as "Doctor Billy," had lived in those days when the Carpenter of Nazareth was laying the foundation of Christianity, he would have been one of the Master's most dependable helpers. His practice was the most extensive, I think, in Southeastern Kansas. He was the leading elder in the church I served as pastor. I have never in my life known a more consistent Christian in daily living, nor one with broader vision of church activities.

Until your mother and I set up our home, I lived with the Williams family. No other man, in all my life, has ever meant to me what Doctor Billy meant. Our friendship was so close, so intimate, so much a relationship of our inner selves, that for me to attempt to write about it, even now, seems almost a sacrilege. I need scarcely add

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that Doctor Billy had read the original manuscript of my story and was one of my circle of advisers.

Doctor Billy greeted me with: "Hal, I have to make a call about fourteen miles out in the country. You've been working too hard lately. Come along. The ride and rest will do you good."

When we were well away from the city and had talked of this and that, Doctor Billy asked casually: "What are you doing with that story of yours, Hal?"

"What am I doing with it? Huh! I've chucked it out of sight and forgotten it. You know what a mess the *Christian Century* made of it. There's nothing I can do about it now."

Doctor Billy was silent for a while then he said in his quiet, convincing way: "I think you're wrong, Hal. You should try to do something with it yet. The message of that story ought not to be lost."

"But what can I do?"

"Don't you know someone who is familiar with such things who could advise you?"

"I met a man in Chicago when I was there for that church meeting," I answered. "He is superintendent or manager or something like that of the Book Supply Company, a mail-order house. He ought to know about books and publishing. He was very nice to me; found a particular Bible for me; one that I'd been wanting for a long time; invited me to his home on Sunday afternoon. His name is Reynolds."

"That's the man. You take the manuscript of your



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story to him and ask him what to do with it. Don't send it, take it; go to Chicago and talk with him about it." Doctor Billy spoke as if he had known Mr. Reynolds all his life and told me what to do, with the convincing authority which always backed his professional orders to a patient. That was Doctor Billy's way: when once he had made up his mind, one knew that his mind was made up.

"But Billy, I can't go to Chicago."

"Why can't you?"

"You know very well why I can't. I haven't the money to pay my fare."

It is true that in those days I was handicapped by lack of money. It was not always easy to make even the necessary ends meet. Books and travel were wholly out of reach. It might have been something in my voice or manner. Doctor Billy said quickly: "Look here, Hal. You know what my practice is; you know I'm making good money."

"Yes."

"Well, the time is coming when you will make more money in a single month writing books than I'll make in five years practicing medicine."

I laughed at the absurd prophecy, and felt better.

"That's all right," Billy retorted. "You can laugh, but I know. Some day you'll have all the money you need. Just now I happen to have it. And now listen to me, Hal. I couldn't write a novel to save my life, but if I could, that story of yours is exactly the sort of thing I would write. I believe in that story. I know the church

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needs the message it carries. I want the book published. I want to put up the necessary money for you to go to Chicago with it and see Mr. Reynolds."

I started to protest, but he checked me with: "I don't mean a loan. I mean I want to furnish this necessary expense money for exactly the same reason that led you to write the book. And by your own teaching you have no right to refuse. You are always preaching your gospel of Service. What right have you to keep me from doing what I believe to be a real service to the Christian cause? You did your part when you wrote the book. This expense money is my part, and you can't keep me from doing it."

Of course I couldn't keep him from doing it.

And that, my sons, is the true story of how your father's first novel, "That Printer of Udell's" happened to be written and published.

I received my first copy from the publishers a few days before my thirty-first birthday, which at the time of this writing was thirty years ago.

Even when this book got itself talked about and, in many pulpits, preached about, I still had no idea of giving up my church work. The Pittsburg congregation responded most encouragingly to my pleadings for Applied Christianity, and a number of the ideas of church work illustrated in my story were actually undertaken. No man could have more loyal support, not only by the church members but of the entire community.

The five years of this Pittsburg ministry were, in a way, the five most satisfactory years of my life. It was

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there that the Hiram College girl and I set up house-keeping. It was there that you, Gilbert, and your brother Paul, with Doctor Billy's help, were born. But by this time I was personally giving Doctor Billy not a little professional practice. Every now and then I was called upon to pay something on account of my old battle with pneumonia. It is not too much to say that on more than one occasion Doctor Billy literally saved my life. Malaria took a hand in the game, and it became advisable for me to move. In fact, I reached a point where I was physically unable to carry on the work. I could not even conduct the regular church services because of a troublesome cough. Doctor Billy said if I did not give up my work in Pittsburg I could not live a year. It was not easy for either Doctor Billy or for me.

After a summer in the Ozarks I was able to take a congregation in Kansas City with the purpose of rebuilding it into what was then called an institutional church. I looked forward now to what I thought was to be my life work. But my old pneumonia and the Kansas City winter combined against me. After about two years the doctors said I must give up my Kansas City ministry or die.

As you may imagine, I felt rather low. It seemed that I was never to be permitted to attain my idea of usefulness as a preacher. I could not bear the thought of drilling along in the same old ruts; turning over the old sermon barrel every two or three years, getting nowhere toward a realization of my vision which alone made the

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work worth the effort. A half-sick preacher is just about the most useless creature imaginable.

While I was trying to find an answer to my problem, the thought came: "It may be that preaching is not the work that I can do best. It may be that I should write."

With that, I determined to make a test case. I would deliberately set myself to write a novel. You see, I looked upon "That Printer of Udell's" as a sort of accident. It was not written primarily as a story. I now determined to write a novel deliberately. I agreed with myself that if this trial story succeeded to any positive degree I would take it as proving that writing was my job. If the book turned out a failure, I would accept the failure as proof that writing was not my job.

Having decided upon this test, it was inevitable that I should turn for my material to the Ozark Mountains and to those backwoods folk I knew so well.

Ever since that first visit to White River, I had never missed an opportunity of going into the wilderness. From these brief camping expeditions I knew the region about Dewy Bald, Mutton Hollow, and Marvel Cave. I sent you boys, Gilbert and Paul, and your mother away for a vacation and went alone to this Ozark neighborhood, where I lived in a tent on a hilltop and boarded at the near-by home of Mr. and Mrs. Ross.

I made notes and outlined this novel, "The Shepherd of the Hills," that summer amid the actual scenes described in the story. The book was written the following winter in Lebanon, Missouri.

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After the publication of "The Shepherd of the Hills," when its success was an established fact, I stood by my resolution to accept the result of the experiment. I gave up my church work and set myself seriously to the work of writing. I had said many times during those ten years with the church that if I ever came to feel that I could render better service in some other field of endeavor, I would leave the pulpit as unceremoniously as I had entered it. When I became convinced that, all things considered, writing was the work I could do best, I undertook that job in exactly the same spirit with which I had undertaken the work of preaching. I repeat, I did not seek the job of preaching; the job found me. It is just as true that I did not seek the work of writing: that job, too, found me.

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## XII

IF I WERE WRITING A REGULAR AUTOBIOGRAPHY FOR you boys, I should of course include the last thirty years of my life as well as the first thirty. But I promised you in the beginning that I would not write a regular autobiography for you or for anyone else. I still think that nothing could be more unnecessary or more tiresome to do. I set out to write for you only those impressions and experiences of my early life which I see now from the vantage of my sixty years as the influences that led me finally to my work as a writer. I was inspired to do this by a desire which I think is common to all parents—the desire to be more intimately known to one's children. If I did not tell you about those first thirty years, you would never know what kind of man your father was before you entered into his affairs. To that degree I should be a stranger to you. No father who can possibly manage otherwise ought to be a stranger to his sons.

“The Shepherd of the Hills,” in deciding for me what my real life work was to be, marked the end of that part of my life of which, if I myself did not tell you, you could never know. It marks as well the beginning of that part with which you are already familiar and of which,

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therefore, I feel there is no need for me to write. When "The Shepherd of the Hills" was published, you older boys were already fairly well acquainted with your dad.

A very learned friend, a member of the faculty of a great university, once asked me: "Where are you in your thinking now, Hal?" And it seems to me this book to you, my sons, would be incomplete did I not attempt to sum up for you the result of the experiences I have related. I mean that I should round out the story by giving you, so far as I can, your father's "thinking" now; that I should give you the total, as it were, of his sixty years of living. Many times you boys have asked, "What do you think about it, dad?" Well, here are some of the things I think.

Because I have told you about some of the storms I've encountered does not at all signify that I think my life, in the main, differs much from every other life. There are no fair-weather voyages from the cradle to the grave. One ship meets a gale off the coast of Alaska; another is caught in a storm off Cape Cod; another encounters a hurricane in the South Seas. The forces engaged—the sea, the wind, the rocks, the waves, the integrity of the ship, the seamanship of officers and crew—are much the same. The sailor has no voice in the matter. He did not voluntarily sign on for the voyage. He was shanghaied. He awoke and found himself at sea. He cannot say where or when he will encounter a storm. He has no control

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over the elements. He can only make the best of it—or the worst.

And there comes to every soul, I think, hours of grief or despair or fear, when, caught in the maelstrom of circumstances or battered by the waves of misfortune or shaken by the reefs of temptation or driven by a hurricane of grief or passion, he can do no more than grimly hold fast.

Well it is for the voyager if at such a time he have some deep and enduring principle of life to which he can anchor. Many a ship of life has been wrecked, many a pitiful human derelict is drifting today, hopeless, because in the hour of danger he found no anchorage that would hold.

So I say to you, my sons, have convictions. Find something to which you can hold, and make fast to it. Formulate your own creeds if you will, but do not be creedless. If your anchor drags—as it probably will at times—then, as speedily as you can, find better ground and hold to that.

For my own convictions, I have been driven at last to what I believe to be the foundation laws of life. I have anchored my soul to certain truths and principles of life that I am forced to accept because to disbelieve in them is, for me, impossible. And it is these foundation laws of life which give me my conception of Deity.

First of all, I believe in Life itself. I do not mean the incidents or events of a passing day or age, nor any particular phase of human affairs. I mean Life as a whole.



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I cannot believe that this life that we know is a mere accident that just happened without intelligent plan or purpose, coming out of nothing and ending in nothing. I am forced to accept this life that I know as a bit of that eternity which no man knows. As you watch a passing ship at sea, you do not believe that the vessel with all its visible evidence of planned order and discipline just happened out of nothing, even though you cannot name the port from which it sailed or the harbor for which it is bound. So reason forces me to believe in Life, even though I know nothing about the eternity whence it comes and to which it goes.

But in my thinking I do not see Life as a ship in mid-ocean. I see it as a river flowing to the sea. Somewhere far away in the heart of unnamed mountains a tiny vein of water finds its way from unknown sources through unknown elements to the light of the outer world. From its rocky cradle, under a cliff perhaps, or in the shadowy quiet of some deep ravine, the new-born stream slips away on its long journey to the distant ocean. Down the mountain it leaps from ledge to ledge, tumbling among the granite boulders of the canyon floor, rippling over pebbly shoals on the lower bench lands or resting in deep pools where lusty trout make their homes. In the wide valleys far below its mountain birthplace it creeps softly beneath great arches of the leafy forest, flecked with shade and sunshine, or glides with scarce a murmur through broad meadows in the hushed and silent night.

Here and there it pauses to bathe the feet of lordly

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oak or stately elm, or to kiss the finger-tips of drooping willow. In the pasture lands cattle come to drink and lift their dripping lips in thankfulness. A score of times men check its course and bid it turn their busy wheels. Bare-foot children bring to it their laughter and play. Sometimes its way is fringed with sweet grasses and fragrant flowers; at other times fierce winter tries to hold it fast with chains and bars of ice. But always, obedient to the law of its being, the stream pushes steadily onward to the sea. Always it grows broader and deeper and stronger, until in time the tiny streamlet has become a river whereon boats ply to and fro from cities that men have built along its banks. And so, at last, the stream finds that place where ships from every land are gathered, and the ocean old with its thousand, thousand waves sings a song of welcome while stately vessels bow their heads in greeting.

The primary law of the river's being is that it must go to the sea. But in all the changing scenes through which the river passes, under every condition that confronts the stream in its course, the water is essentially the same. In every foot of its journey it obeys the great law of nature that bids it follow the way set for it from the far place of its beginning to that vast place to which at last all the waters of the world must come.

So I see Life flowing from some far distant and unknown beginning, to a limitless and incomprehensible ocean which no man can name. And through all the changing ages known to history and science the essential elements of Life have not changed.

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The human genius that first swung a torch of fagots in the night, or built a signal fire on the mountaintop, is the same genius that today writes a message in the sky with the beam of a searchlight for a pencil. The instinct which led primitive man to fashion his first hunting spear of flint is the same instinct that has given the world the intricate machinery of modern business.

The urge that drove a primitive soul to model from the clay at his feet the first rude pot, or to scratch upon the rocks a crude pictured story of the chase, is the same urge that has given us the beauties of art and literature.

And every step in the development of the human race has been made in obedience to certain foundation laws of Life. The very existence of humanity itself rests upon these laws. They are as fixed as the law which bids the river follow its course to the sea. They have never been amended. They can never be repealed.

To these laws—or, if you prefer—to these fundamental and universal instincts and principles of Life as I observe them in human affairs and in nature, I have anchored. I commend the anchorage to you, my sons; at least the idea is not unworthy of your consideration.

For me, the ancient and familiar saying, "Self-preservation is the first law of nature," has a far deeper significance than is noted in the common use. I think of this Law of Life not in its narrow sense of setting men against each other but in its broader meaning of leading men to protect each other with all that it implies of the perpetua-

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tion and perfection of Life. It is this law that gives the creatures of the forest and of the desert and of the sea in every clime and land their coats of protective color. It shows the wolf where to den and the eagle where to build. It teaches the spider how to fashion the pattern of its cunning web and instructs the silkworm in the weaving of its gossamer shroud. It gave the bee the architecture of the honeycomb and schooled the beaver in civil engineering. The very color and form of the butterfly's wing is a demonstration of this universal first law. And more, the trees of the forest, the flowers of the field, the shrubs of the hillside, and the grasses of the meadow and pasture, evidence in a thousand ways that they too obey this first law of nature and become thus our voiceless fellow citizens in the Kingdom of the World.

In the growth and development of the human race this law of self-preservation has been, is, and will be, supreme. In it are the beginnings of governments, the seeds of revolutions, and the establishment of succeeding better governments. In it are the beginnings and development of all moral standards. For what are moral standards, after all, but this instinct of self-preservation in man, operating to protect himself from himself?

You will find, if you think it out, that this law is the true beginning, foundation, and development of all art and literature, inasmuch as art and literature have their beginnings and the vitality of their growth in the instinctive strivings of humankind to express and to preserve that part of themselves which is not mere flesh and blood.

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It is the foundation and beginning of religions, inasmuch as the religions of every age and people are but the instinctive protest of the race against human dissolution and decay, and the efforts of the human soul to protect and preserve its conscious immaterial self.

I believe in the inherent and essential Rightness of Life. I do not refer to the standards of righteousness set up by passing creeds and religions. I mean that deeper rightness which creeds and religions attempt to voice. Not the rightness of the innumerable laws that have in all ages been enacted, but that underlying rightness which inspired the enactments. Not the rightness that belongs to any particular period of time but the rightness that ordains the changing times. Not the rightness that is peculiar to any distinct people but the rightness that is as universal as the cry of pain or joy; as universal as the tear or the laugh; as universal as hunger or thirst. A rightness that is as savor to salt, as sweetness to honey, as light and warmth to flame. A rightness that is the rightness of the bird's song, the mating call of the cattle, the color of the flower, the texture of the moss, the fashion of the trees, the sculpture of the rocks, the form and lightness of the clouds, and the rhythm of the ocean tides.

I believe in having ideals. I know how old-fashioned I am in using the word, but I cannot help it. I still think that a crack shot is developed by persistent and consistent shooting at a definite mark. Of course if one is satisfied to burn his powder for no purpose but to hear it go *bang*,

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a target is not necessary. I sometimes think that most of our riflemen these days are so pleased with the noise they make that they do not even know what they are shooting at. Perhaps it would be just as well that they should thus amuse themselves—if only they could be kept off the range so as not to get in the way of those who enjoy making a bull's-eye now and then.

I can best tell you what I think about "These Times" and all that, by sketching briefly for you a crude outline of this onward flow of the Stream of Life as it appears to me.

Somewhere in the dim light of our beginnings, obedient to the first law of nature, primitive Man sought safety in primitive coöperation, and the tribe was born. Following as naturally and inevitably as water runs downhill, came tribal laws, tribal ideals. It was inevitable that those who most nearly conformed to the common ideal of humankind should become the leaders of the primitive band, and thus we have the beginning of kings and governments—the origin of Royalty.

I use the term "royalty," not in its narrow and restricted sense as applied to certain exalted personages who rule over certain people, but in its broader sense, as meaning the supreme representatives of the people; the living expressions of the highest ideals of those who bow to them in loyal homage.

From the past the word "royalty" has come down to us with its essential meaning unaltered. While theoretic-

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cally we in this country have no royalty, we still speak of kingly men and queenly women, meaning by these terms nothing less than this: That such men and women most nearly measure up to our highest ideals of humankind. We have our Kings of Finance, Cotton Kings, and Cattle Kings. We have our Queens of the Stage, Queens of Society, and Queens of the Home. There are Princes of the Church, Merchant Princes, the Prince of Good Fellows. And we unquestionably mean by such familiar terms that these persons are the foremost living expressions of the common ideals of the subjects in the particular realm over which they reign.

Among primitive peoples, forced to sustain life in the midst of constant physical dangers, physical prowess, mere brute strength, must have been of supreme importance. This first royalty must have been the Royalty of Physical Strength.

With the onward flow of the river, as Man's development carried him farther and farther from the animal—or, rather, with the ever increasing power of Man's inventive, reasoning, and imaginative faculties—the religions of mankind underwent a corresponding change. From the worship of material objects, of stone and plants and clouds and the sun and moon, Man came slowly to the age when physical and material gods no longer met his need of Deity. He therefore, quite consistently, set himself to the making of gods, seeking with hideous or beautiful images of unearthly aspect to satisfy the hunger of his growing spiritual nature. But these man-made gods too, in the full-

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ness of time, failed, and as Man himself became more and more wonderful to himself, Man himself became the expression of Deity.

And when man began to find God in Man, with royal personages held as the highest conceivable ideal human beings, royalty was bound to become most closely related to divinity. Kings came to be more than kings, and held their thrones by divine right. They were kings not because they were the strongest, the most intelligent, or the most worthy, but because God ordained them kings. Royalty was a gift from a mysterious omnipotent power, an accident of birth.

With God behind him, the king no longer needed to be kingly. The royal family no longer needed to live royal lives. The world and all its wealth belonged to them. The people were their subjects and their slaves. Thus the Royalty of Strength passed into the Royalty of Privilege.

But the Stream of Life still flowed seaward. That part of Man which is not physical increased in power. Religious development and conceptions of Deity correspondingly changed. More and more, Deity came to be represented not by royalty but by the people. The voice of the people became the voice of God.

Little by little, in parliament and council, in rebellion and revolutions, the people, obeying that first law of nature, have taken from kings the privilege of divine right, until the privilege of royalty has become not a privilege extended by God but a privilege granted by the



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people. And those nations of the earth that are the front of the onward-sweeping tide are nearing now a new royalty.

But listen, my sons. This Royalty of Privilege still holds itself to be the reigning power. While it is true that it does not, today, base its claims upon the old divine right, it is as true that its assumptions are in no way based upon those laws of compensation which are the balance wheels of life. It has come down to us out of the dark ages. It was born of the Royalty of Superior Strength and Cunning and is rearing in our midst an unholy brood of the legitimate descendants from those days when royalty, recognizing no laws, claimed the earth as its own, and the peoples of the earth as its vassals. Its pride is the ignoble pride of being served. It feels no shame in its impudent assumption that it is privileged to live without work. Its claims are based upon the very fact of its uselessness. Its spirit is a spirit of indifference to the suffering or the happiness of the people.

It talks in swelling words about ITS RIGHTS! It has no rights. It is as savage and cruel as any of its prehistoric ancestors, while it lacks even the virtue of their strength. It would plunge nations into war to fill its already overflowing coffers. It would turn the stream of life back and make of the world a muddy swamp of serfdom and slavery. It would not deny itself a rag of lace to save the world.

In this age, when Man has gained the highest level of his intellectual and spiritual life, our Royalty of Privi-

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lege has brought upon us conditions that for pure brutal savagery surpass the days of the red Indians and the Malay Wolves of the Sea. In this age, while we have achieved the noblest conception of life and the highest standard of human welfare and happiness yet reached in human history, our Royalty of Privilege has forced us to endure the world's greatest, most destructive, cruel, and senseless war; and while still staggering under the burden of that war, to prepare for other wars yet to come. Our Kings of Finance and Commerce, our Princes of Graft and Political Profit, seem to have reached that exalted plane where the worth of a man is determined by his ability to kill, to invent more effective methods of killing or by his readiness to be killed.

My generation has witnessed advances in science greater than the total gains of all the preceding ages, but our Royalty of Privilege decrees that millions upon millions of the people must turn in shame and humiliation to charity for their daily bread.

In a day that has given to the study of child life an importance never before known in history, our Kings of Greed and Graft weave the strength of Boys and girls into fabrics that are offered for sale at every dry-goods counter in the land. In the guise of public service, our elected servants receive the honors and privileges of their positions while engaged in betraying the people who placed them in office.

It is far from the royalty that was accorded the divine right, a heavenly origin, and the healing power of the

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king's touch, to our modern royalty of most earthly origin that is looked upon with slavish awe by its foolish subjects because the king's touch is a Midas touch that turns everything to gold.

But our Kings of Finance, our Queens of Idleness, and our Princes of Political Pull, our Lords and Masters of Privilege, represent the popular ideals of our day as truly as did the first chieftain of the first primitive tribe and the royalty of the dark ages.

How in the name of common sense could it be otherwise? For at least a generation, now, the young minds of this country have been fed with this idea that Privilege is the highest state to which an American citizen can aspire. We have exalted our Royalty of Privilege before the growing youth of the land, in the family circle, in schools and universities, and in the church. Our Lords and Masters of Privilege have been heralded as the highest, by newspapers, magazines, and pictures. Day by day, as our boys and girls have grown toward citizenship they have seen our courts and legislators obey the will of Privilege. They have watched with us the representatives of the people enact laws for the benefit of the royal few, and servants of the people, from the lowliest small-town peace officers to the President, bow before their royal will.

Idle workers, bread-lines, under-nourished childhood, hungry mothers, homeless families; charities and doles in a scale never before known; violence, mobs, racketeers, bootleggers, kidnappers, murderers even of babies for a

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price; underworld rule; destitute farms; youthful criminals, lawlessness and vice among boys and girls; overcrowded prisons; the general breaking down of moral standards, the impotence of religion, the disintegration of our civilization—all this, I say, is the legitimate harvest we are reaping from our planting of the ideal of Privilege.

But returning to my concept of Life as a river flowing ever onward in obedience to the fundamental law of its being, I must believe that "These Times" and this Royalty of Privilege too shall pass.

In every river there are eddies where the water appears to flow back toward the source of the stream. So there are eddies in the onward flow of this Stream of Life; times when Man seems to turn back to his beginnings. I think that the present world condition, that these times of our national distress, is such a turning back. I believe we are caught in an eddy of the stream; that the great dominating current of life, obedient to the unchanging law of its being, is flowing irresistibly onward. I believe that we are nearing the day of a new royalty.

The most thoughtful men of affairs in every walk of life, I think, are beginning to recognize this solemn truth: That the gravest perils which we as a people face today are in ourselves, that America is America's greatest enemy. That this Royalty of Privilege is more menacing to our peace and prosperity than the dangers of any entanglement with foreign powers. That these threatening

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perils of Privilege arise out of the peculiar character and genius of our citizenship, and that to combat them calls for the highest patriotism, the most steadfast courage, the most loyal patience, and the most enduring strength.

The dangers which, through our Royalty of Privilege, menace us today are these:

That we shall lose faith in our fellowman; that the creed of the few who say "trust no man, for every man has his price" may become the creed of the many.

That we shall lose faith in law; that the practice of holding laws and courts in contempt may become a precedent.

That we shall lose faith in common honesty; that the doctrines of those who justify sharp practice and trickery by the measure of the gold temporarily gained may become the universal doctrine.

That we shall lose faith in common decency; that the low and vicious practice of making a jest of purity and a mock of virtue may grow into a fixed belief that purity and virtue are not.

That we shall lose faith in love; that the vulgar fashion of those who look upon the most sacred relations of life with sneering question and vile doubt may become a common fashion.

That we shall lose faith in the progress of the race; that we shall foolishly mistake an eddy in the great Stream of Life for the onward sweep of its mighty current.

That we shall lose faith in Life itself, and thus play

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our parts in the world's drama with careless indifference or criminal neglect.

If there be any truths in human history and in the laws of nature, these truths declare that a people who have no more faith in humankind, who have no more faith in laws, in honesty, in purity, in love, in their race or in life—that such a people shall perish from the earth, annihilated by the scourge of their own disbelief in the fundamental laws of human existence, of human welfare and happiness.

If you, my sons, and the young men and women of your generation can witness the hideous spectacles that are daily presented to you by every news sheet and picture theater in the land, and still keep alive these faiths; if you can look calmly and unmoved at the opportunities that are offered you to profit by the ruin of others; if you can withstand the temptation to reap harvests of material gain by the sowing of human wretchedness and want and woe—then indeed will you prove yourselves the saviors of your country. Then indeed will you keep that which is committed to you and fulfill your high mission among the peoples of earth.

But suppose you do not save your country from itself. Suppose America finds no place to stop on its road to ruin. What then?

Well, I do not think you will save it—at least not in my day. I think this Royalty of Privilege will fight to the bitter end. I think "These Times" are a picnic to

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the conditions that your children and perhaps your grandchildren will be called upon to meet.

But what if this nation should fall? I cannot believe that Life would cease its onward flow because of that. Other nations in the past have fallen; other civilizations have gone down before the identical forces which are now assailing us. And still the great Stream of Life has moved on its appointed way. And each civilization in its turn made its contribution to the whole, so the stream has grown broader and deeper. Perhaps America has made its contribution and it is time for us to go. I do not know. I only know that, whether our country stands or falls, the stream will flow on and that it is broader and deeper today because of all that we as a nation have contributed to it. In spite of this eddy in which we are caught, this age is better than the ages of the past. So I believe will the ages to come be better than today. Again I say I believe in Life.

I have said that I believe we are nearing the day of a new royalty. In my thinking, the downfall of the House of Privilege is foretold in every page of human history. Its doom is written in the law of the onward-flowing River of Life. Like the passing of primitive man, with his Royalty of Physical Strength, and the age of divine rights with its cruelties and oppressions; like the passing of the gods of stone and wood, of the age of human sacrifice, witchcraft, the torture rack, the thumbscrews, and the fagot, this day of Privilege must pass.

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As surely as humanity, in obedience to the first law of nature, decreed that human sacrifice as a religious rite should be no more, so surely in obedience to that same law will the people decree that the sacrifice of human beings in the name of commerce and industry must cease. As surely as the people following the instinct for self-preservation banded together and placed their supreme representative upon the throne and in after years, in the name of the same law, took from the kings their crowns, so surely are the people today raising up this new Royalty.

Already in the voice of the people significant changes may be noted. More and more the people are demanding of these lords and masters of Privilege not, "What have you?" but "Where and how did you get it?" Louder and more insistent grows the cry, not "What is your social position or your financial rating, but what is your job?"

Before this rising power of the new royalty parties are being shaken, disorganized, reorganized, and disorganized again. The political pot, heated with the fire of public sentiment, is bubbling and boiling while party cooks are making frantic efforts to hold fast to recipes of a passing age and still satisfy the changing tastes of the people.

And this new royalty, the royalty that in obedience to the first law of nature, is coming into power, is the Royalty of Service.

From this new royalty the righteous edict shall go forth to all mankind alike: "SERVE!"

To those in business it will command, "SERVE!" A



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fair and just profit for the use of the tool with which you work, which is capital, and for the human ability and energy you expend, shall be yours, but you shall no longer make huge profits upon what you do not do.

It will say to Labor, "SERVE!" The measure of your strength shall not be in terms of envy and hatred for those who toil with their brains instead of their hands; it shall not be in the persuasive eloquence of your agitators and organizers who would breed among you anarchism and infidelity and class hatred. It shall not be in your mobs or your demonstrations. The measure of your strength shall be the measure of the intelligent, faithful service rendered to the race.

It will say to the artist and the writer, "SERVE!" Your rank among men shall no longer be determined by the grace of your twitterings at social functions and clubs of your kind or by paragraphs in your journals; your rank shall be fixed by the worth to the world of the products of your genius as that worth is measured in terms of truth and mental cleanliness, of ideals and inspiration and hope and cheer.

It will say to the educators, "SERVE!" Your worth to the world shall no longer be judged by the degrees you have received from educational institutions, but by the contributions you make to the serviceable knowledge of the world.

It will say to the scientist, "SERVE!" Your place in life shall no longer be fixed by the things you are sup-

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posed to know but by those scientific discoveries that add to the sum of human comfort, human happiness.

It will say to religious institutions, "SERVE!" Your claim to recognition by the world's workers shall no longer be based upon your fidelity to creeds of the past and to doctrines of the days that are gone. No privilege shall be accorded to you because you are professionally held to be better than your fellows. You shall take your place in the ranks of the workers and be held worthy or unworthy just to the degree that your teaching leads to the welfare and happiness of humanity.

It will say to the politician, "SERVE!" For the day when a man may win a place in the ranks of lawmakers and executors by the power of political trickery, the sophistry of the spellbinder, or the ingenuity of his campaign manager is past. The day has come when the public official who would use his place of trust to betray the people for his own profit will be ranked with that prince of politicians, Pilate, who crucified the Christ that he might hold his job.

In obedience to that first law of nature, the law of self-preservation, the Royalty of Service will make wars impossible. It will say to those who have in their hands the gift of war or the gift of peace:

"Thou shalt not kill."

"Thou shalt not take the strength of the race from the service of life and offer it upon the bloody altar of warfare, a living sacrifice to death.

"Thou shalt not turn the stream of human energy to

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move the wheels of that mill of hell that grinds out torment for the people.

"Thou shalt not enlist the best genius of the land in the service of the red god and compel it to invent and operate instruments of racial destruction.

"Thou shalt not take the brain of the thinker and the hand of the artist and the eyes of the scientist and the muscles of the laborer and the tongue of the statesman, and force them to contribute to human suffering and want and woe.

"In the name of the first law of nature, 'Thou shalt not kill'!"

This new royalty will ordain a new pride. To replace the ignoble pride of being served, it will ordain the noble pride of service. It will ordain a new patriotism, a patriotism not of death but of life; a patriotism that will recognize the truth: To live for one's country is greater than to die for it. A patriotism that will pay its taxes, that will respect the laws.

And this new royalty will rule by divine right—the divine right of faith in man, of faith in law, of faith in common decency, of faith in common honesty, of faith in love; the divine rightness that is expressed in the progress of the race, the divine right of human life itself.

This Royalty of Service, our royalty of tomorrow, is the fullest expression of the highest ideals to which the human race in these thousands of generations has attained. It will ascend the throne in the name of the first law of nature, the law of racial self-preservation; the law

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of the perpetuation and perfection of life. Its patent of nobility is conferred by that ideal citizen of all time who a few hours before they nailed Him to a guidepost where the roads to heaven, earth, and hell meet, declared to His followers the foundation law and principle of all human welfare and happiness: "Let him that is greatest among you be your servant."

As to the church, I hold that Jesus never gave to men an impracticable, impossible teaching. It is those who have added to the simplicity of Jesus's teachings and multiplied His plain understandable truths by weird, fantastic theological moonshine, who have made it difficult to live a Christian life.

I entered upon that work as free from prejudice as was humanly possible. My experiences over a period of ten years, as a pastor, led me to the conviction, which I still hold, that the modern church, with its many conflicting denominations, which are built upon ecclesiastically developed creeds and professions of faith, is not Christian in the sense that the life, example, and teaching of Jesus constitute Christianity.

It has been my privilege to know many men and women whose individual lives followed so closely the life of Jesus as to put to shame the denominational institutions of which they were members. My reverence for those rare souls has deepened with time. The spiritual knowledge gained through my association with them has been a light to me in many a dark hour.

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I think the denomination leaders and the clergy are responsible for the breaking down of the church as a Christianizing and saving influence in the affairs of men.

If a large part of common workaday folk think somewhat less of preachers than perhaps they should, I am inclined to believe that it is because the average parson esteems *himself* rather more highly than he should. It is to be expected that the average preacher would rate himself a bit high, because there are so many followers of Jesus who make more of their pastor than they do of their Lord. These super-loyal members of the flock forget that it is just as easy to make a fool out of a spiritual leader as it is to spoil a politician by permitting him to think that his job exists for him, rather than that he exists for his job.

It is not easy for a servant to keep the service attitude of mind when he is continually exalted above those whom he serves. A preacher is no exception to this truth. When so many religious enthusiasts in mistaken zeal exalt a preacher above all others who minister, and place him so high above those to whom he ministers, it is almost impossible for the exalted one to consider himself no better than others. Thus, instead of the clergy serving the people, we have the people ministering to the clergy. Jesus saw the necessity of guarding against this perversion of servant and served. He called the attention of His disciples to the true position of the spiritual leader in His brand of Christianity by that amazingly forceful example when He girt a towel about Himself and washed the feet

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of His followers and then illuminated this most lowly service by the immortal words which forever exalted those who serve above all others.

I would like to see our Lord Bishops and Princes of the Church square their attitudes toward the people who minister to their luxuries, with this teaching of Jesus. My observation is, too, that the average parson is not one little bit more holy or devout than many humble members of his flock who toil at lowly tasks unnoticed, and out of their meager earnings support him on a much better plane of living than they themselves can afford. I have never yet been able to feel that a preacher should live better than the common run of the people to whom he preaches. Jesus did not live above His followers. He lived with them. Their circumstances were His circumstances. I have heard it argued that the parson must live better than his people because he is a man of education and cultivated tastes, and all that. But I doubt if any modern priest or preacher is mentally or spiritually as far above his flock as Jesus was superior to His people.

I do not believe that the world today is as godless as we sometimes think. People have merely lost their realization of God. Conceptions of God which commonly prevailed and which were effective forces in the average man's life, a generation ago, have been rendered ineffective. The world senses God, but has lost touch with Him. The average man believes in God, but cannot realize

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Him; his understanding of Deity is too vague, too uncertain to be a potent factor in his everyday life.

And this is so, in general, I think, because God is not presented to the world in the terms of our modern daily life experiences. The orthodox priestly concept of God does not square with our present-day understanding of life.

That I can no longer subscribe to the divinity of ecclesiastical councils, nor acknowledge as divine the authority of church courts, does not at all mean that for me, now, there is no God. It means simply that I am forced to restate for myself my understanding of Deity.

I am well aware that this conception of God which I find so satisfying is not new. It is embodied in the old systems of theology, but it has been so lost in a wilderness of ecclesiastical doctrines and dogmas that it has ceased to be a vital, active principle in modern thought and life.

I have gained this new understanding of God not from what ecclesiastical authorities have told me I must believe, but from what life, in the midst of which I live, and of which I am part, compels me to believe.

As I have watched the onward flow of the river and have seen science advancing steadily and surely from revelation to revelation in the unfolding of life's mysteries, I have found myself definitely and positively drawing nearer to God. I have come to feel God in the most commonplace acts of everyday life. In the familiar and common objects of my daily experiences I recognize the

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Divine. I no longer distinguish between finite and infinite. Time and eternity are the same. I am this day living eternal life. The material is an expression of the spiritual. Man is *in fact* "a spirit saturating clay." Death is an incident in life. My slice of toast at breakfast is not figuratively but literally "bread of life." It is no longer a mere symbol of the divine life, it is the fact, the thing itself.

I must ask you, my sons, to believe that in this reference to bread I am not writing in any mere rhetorical sense. I am not trying to "put words somewhat prettily together." I am writing as clearly and exactly as possible the actual things I wish to say.

Consider, then, your slice of toast—or, if you prefer, your "stack of wheats." Nothing could be more commonplace, more remote from cathedral chapter and vested choir. And yet, no ritual ever devised, no articles of faith ever ordained, can tell you so much about God or make His presence at your breakfast table so real.

Ages before the prayer "Give us this day our daily bread" was formulated this wheat from which your slice of toast is made was a vital factor in the life of man. It antedates the most ancient languages. The Swiss of the neolithic period cultivated it. It was grown in prehistoric Mesopotamia, ancient Egypt and Phoenicia, and cultivated in China three thousand years before Christ. It has played a mighty part in the history of man and in the development of civilization. As an essential element in the present-day world's food it is of dominating impor-



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tance. Surely a thing so vital to the very existence of human life should tell us something about God!

There are thirty-seven countries in the world's wheat field and a single harvest yields one hundred and fifty million tons. Think of wheat in terms of land and machinery, elevators and railroads, ships and flour mills and bakeries. Think of the iron foundries and smelters, the mines and forests that furnish the material for the wheat machinery, and railroads, and ships, and mills. What does it all mean in terms of human inventive genius, in scientific research, in labor and thought? How many millions of human souls are enlisted in the service of wheat? We are barked in our effort to grasp the magnitude of this thing which comes to us in our breakfast toast.

You ask what is this wheat of which your slice of toast is made? Chemistry obligingly analyzes a single grain of wheat and informs you it is composed of eighteen substances, and gives you the exact per cent of each part of the whole. You are not satisfied, and science tells you more. A single grain of wheat fills twenty to thirty cubic millimeters of space. The embryo, germ, or chit, fills only one-fourteenth of this space. Fertilization, which takes place within the wheat flower, is an operation so delicate that it can scarcely be seen with the unaided eye. *The spark of life which is passed is microscopic.*

Of the multiplying power of wheat, Paley says three hundred grains from one is a moderate estimate, with four hundred as a possible one. *In other words, a single microscopic spark of wheat life is capable of producing*

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*in six years millions of bushels more than the entire world production of wheat for the year 1927.*

Turn again to my crudely sketched picture of the world's production of wheat: elevators, mills, machinery, railroads, ships, bakeries, factories, foundries, mines, lumber yards, vast armies of laborers, armies of brain workers. *And all this from something which can be seen only with the aid of a powerful microscope!*

Again you appeal to science: What *is* this spark of life? But science cannot tell you what it is. Science knows only that it *is*. Science can weigh and measure and analyze the material grain of wheat, but no science can weigh or measure or analyze this invisible spark of life which in six years can produce the world's supply of wheat and without which there would be no wheat.

Science knows that the wheat germ planted in the earth builds a wonderful laboratory that extracts from the soil and the atmosphere the raw materials from which it manufactures and assembles the parts of the wheat plant. But the intelligence which devised these chemical processes, directs the operation of this laboratory, and superintends the manufacturing—*that intelligence which is in the invisible, unknowable spark of life*—before that awful mystery science can only stand in silent and humble reverence. To me that spark of life, which is so baffling to science, so remote in its mystery, and yet so ever present in the most commonplace, so awful in its potentiality—to me, I say, that spark of life is God.

I employ no figure of speech, but state a most literal

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truth when I say that in my slice of breakfast toast I realize God.

People ask, "Do you believe in God?"

To me the question is absurd. I neither believe nor disbelieve. I accept God.

One does not believe or disbelieve in a mountain, the ocean, or the Mississippi River. That two plus two equals four is not a matter for belief or disbelief, it is something to accept. There is here no law to be obeyed or violated. By no violation of law can two plus two be made to equal five. In this simple and most elemental fact of two plus two is the timing of the stars and the setting of their courses for a million million years. If two plus two did not eternally equal four, what chaos in the universe! Well, then, this two-plus-two fact is God. As I am compelled to accept this unalterable, eternal fact, I am compelled to accept God.

Does one believe or disbelieve in Time? Can one by any act of will stop the passing of a day, or hurry the march of the years? I do not believe or disbelieve in air. I breathe it. By it I live; without it there is no life. To me God is the atmosphere in which I live. Quite literally I breathe divinity.

One of the greatest of living physicists once said to me: "With the aid of a powerful microscope I examine the smallest portion of matter known to science and I find it is governed by a certain law. I train the largest tele-

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scope on the most distant stars, and I find them governed by the same law. And everything which lies between the bit of matter under my microscope and those worlds which are visible only through the great telescope, I find obedient to that same law."

"Yes," said I, "and that which you term law, I call God."

Science tells me that the cement and brick and wood of which my house is built, with the devices which hold the structure together, are themselves structures composed of atoms held together by a mysterious force, and that if this force which holds a brick or a board together were removed, the brick or board would explode into invisible atomic dust. The earth itself, science says, is held together by this force; without its sustaining power the world would dissolve into a microscopic mist. But what this force is, no scientist can say. To me this force is God. God holds the atoms of matter together in an infinite variety of structures. God is present in the very materials of which my house is built. My home is not figuratively but literally a house of God.

I touch an electric-light button and God wills there shall be light. I turn on the radio and God speaks. God is in the shoes on my feet, the linen on my bed, the food on my table. As God is in all matter, He is literally in me. In God I have my being.

Science has discovered many amazing things about light. Scientists can take a sunbeam apart as one separates the strands of a cord, and show us each separate thread.

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They can weave artificial sunbeams into manufactured sunshine, which they turn on and off at the touch of a finger, or they use individual strands of light at will. They have discovered light that is invisible, light that is cold, light that penetrates dense masses of matter, light that heals, and light that destroys. But the scientists themselves say that the ultimate fact of light lies beyond the range of scientific research and analysis. To me light—all that science knows about it, and the infinitely more that science does not know—light, to me, is God. In the light that tints the morning sky with beauty, paints the flaming glory of the sunset, and clothes the mountains in veils of exquisite color; in the sunshine that enters through my study window, in the moonlight that creeps to my bedside at night, I sense the divine—I feel the presence of my God.

My new understanding of God forces me to a new conception of worship. It exalts the commonplace and deifies the ordinary. It makes me a collaborator with God in divine mysteries. "Give us this day our daily bread," carries a new and more potent meaning. Religion becomes vital. In my worship I am not restricted to set occasions by formulæ prescribed by church councils; I worship involuntarily, as my heart beats, as I breathe.

The sound of the harvester in a field of wheat is to me now a hymn of thanksgiving and praise. The smell of newly plowed ground is the incense of prayer; the acres of grain rippling in the breeze are the banners of Divine

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Glory; the sunshine is His strength; the rain His graciousness; the night His peace. All who in any capacity serve are God's ministers. The garb of the laborer is a priestly robe. The tools of the mechanic, the pen of the writer, the instruments of science, the needle of the seamstress, the utensils of the cook, the humble implements of the housewife, are the sacred furnishings of the temple of life which is the temple of the living God. To live is to worship; to worship is to live.

It has been said that in my stories I am still the preacher. Perhaps that is true. I have often wondered if the criticism would be made so freely if I had never been a preacher. Certainly I have looked upon my writing as a ministry. Not in the false and shallow sense in which that word is limited to the clergy, but in the sense that to be a minister is to minister, to serve. "Let him that is greatest among you be your servant" (minister), was never meant to read: "Be an officially appointed denominational clergyman or professional pastor of a congregation." It was meant to apply to all service rendered by anyone at any time. Music is a ministry, so is painting, so is farming or housekeeping or teaching or being a policeman or a congressman. Writing is a ministry. Which does not at all mean that a novelist should preach. You boys know what I mean.

After it was decided for me that writing was my work, I, of course, set myself to study as best I could, the art

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of writing. But as I have already said, I count myself but a sorry bungler. The best I have been able to do is to develop a little my own faltering technique. I have been saved from utter defeat, I think, by the fortunate discovery that, after all, a piece of fiction is not written by an established formula as a chemist mixes the ingredients of his compound, whether medicinal or explosive. As I see it, writing is the individualized expression of an individual's mental and spiritual reaction to life, and as such it can follow no established technique. The very nature of the effort, it seems to me, demands a technique as individual as the author's viewpoint and convictions.

I have been saved, too, by my realization that "little ships must stay close to shore." The raging billows of the sophisticated intelligentsia are not for me. You, my sons, know that I do not think very highly of myself as a writer. Therefore you will not charge me with anything like false modesty when I say it is quite impossible for me to consider my work in terms of literature. I am not sure that I even know what constitutes a piece of literature. Do you? Nor is this in any sense a confession. I have in this matter nothing to confess.

When some brilliant literary person rises to inform the world with wholly unnecessary heat that my books have no claim to a place in literature, I am amused. To me, it is as though these zealous authorities were revealing the shameful truth that I have no wings but only stupid arms and legs like other poor benighted humans.

As God is my judge, I have never claimed that I

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could fly. I have never claimed so much as a single literary pin-feather. I have felt too keenly my lack of schooling in literature ever to dream of winning a place among the world's accredited authors.

What, then, do I hold to be my place as a writer?

I am content that my readers should answer that. I mean that whatever place I am accorded by those who have read my books, that is my place. I repeat, I have never in my work looked toward a place in literature. But I *have* hoped for some small part in the life of the people for whom I have written. I have not coveted those honors which are bestowed upon the literary great. I have desired only to rank with my own people—the people of whom I am one and to whom I belong as wholly today as I did in those years when I labored with the tools of a stone quarry instead of a pen.

I am not concerned as to whether or not my books will live after I am gone. If any book of mine shall live, it will be because it meets some vital need in human life. If, in the years to come, there should be no need for the truths I have endeavored to place before my fellows, then certainly my books shall and ought to be forgotten. If I have succeeded in touching the lives of those for whom I have written, in any degree, as my mother touched my life, I ask for no better immortality. As for that jade "Fame," the hussy is a sorry old flirt, and I have seen that those who dally with her reap infinitely more pain than pleasure. I simply am not interested.

I am not ashamed that people have read my books. I



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have accepted the fact as indicating that I am doing the work I am best fitted to do, that I have found my job. For that reason I am glad. I remember that sharp-tongued churchman who said to the young parson who was troubled as to whether or not he had been divinely called to preach: "Don't worry, my boy. If God has called you to preach, He'll call an audience to hear you."

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### XIII

WHEN AT LAST I WAS ESTABLISHED IN MY REAL WORK, I made a pilgrimage from California to the old Wright Settlement cemetery. With the help of the sexton and the old maps and records I found the spot. The grave, overgrown with a tangle of rank grass and weeds, had never been marked. I caused a modest block of granite to be erected, and arranged for the perpetual care of the plot. The inscription on the stone says that Alma, wife of William A. Wright, died April 10, 1884. But, with the knowledge of all the years that have passed since those last days of our companionship, I know that the inscription is not true.

I went to Newburgh to see Auntie Sue. She was living with the family of a brother-in-law. Her years of active service were long past. She had nothing left from a life of ministering to others save the barest necessities. She did not know I was coming. I had not seen her since my boyhood, following mother's death.

When we had had several long talks and I had learned more than she ever meant for me to know about her circumstances, I said: "Auntie Sue, do you remember that when I started to go to school at Hiram you sent me five dollars?"

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"Oh, Harold," she protested, "it was so little! If only I could have really helped."

"Little! That five-dollar bill was the best investment you ever made. It has been drawing heavy interest ever since."

"I'm glad," she said earnestly, thinking that I meant something very different from what was in my mind.

"So am I. From now on as long as you live you shall receive an income that will permit you to live with that comfort and independence which you have earned. Your checks will come regularly every month. And if at any time you need an extra sum for anything, you have only to make your wants known. You see, as things have turned out, the business into which you put that five dollars can stand any demands you will make on it."

I do not think that at first the dear old lady quite grasped the idea. But from that day until her death she at least credited me with being a regular financial wizard.

On my return trip West I dropped off at Sennett. The little crossroads village was not much changed. But the roads were improved and automobiles were roaring along the way where I used to drive the cows to and from the pasture. The house on the hill where mother died was just the same, except that the cherry trees in the yard were gone. The store and post-office was as I had known it in boyhood, and was kept by the same family. But the postmistress was older. The old tavern was gone.

It was noon when I arrived; and because there was neither hotel nor restaurant in the village they gave me

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lunch at the post-office. While I ate, I asked questions. Were Mr. and Mrs. Grandy still living?

They were. They lived in a tiny cottage just across the way.

Finishing my lunch, I crossed the street and stood at the gate in the picket fence a few feet from the vine-shaded front porch. Mrs. Grandy, sitting in a low rocking-chair, was reading her Bible. The thought flashed into my mind, how like it was to a scene from one of my own novels! It seemed to be something I was writing, not actually living.

"Mrs. Grandy?" I said, baring my head.

The old Irish lady looked up from her Bible and, removing her glasses, considered me questioningly. "How do ye do, sir?"

"Don't you know me, Mrs. Grandy?"

"Indeed, I do not, sir. I niver put eyes on ye before in me life."

"Oh, yes, you have. You walloped me many a time when I was a kid with your Jimmy and Mary and Ann!" I laughed.

"God bless my soul!" she cried, rising with amazing vigor and coming to meet me as I opened the gate. "'Tis that laugh that I know. 'Tis little Harry Wright, come back after all these years. Only 'tis not little that ye are now. Stand 'round an' lave me have a good look at ye. Ye have yer mother's eyes still. I mind her as if it was only yesterday."

Sometime later Mrs. Grandy and I went down the

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road together, under the eyes of curious neighbors. Crossing the creek at the foot of the little hill, we found Mr. Grandy hoeing potatoes on the far side of the orchard across the road from the house where they lived when I was a boy. What fun it was convincing Jim that I, the stranger, was little Harry Wright. When at last he yielded, he shouldered his hoe and went back to the house with us.

All that afternoon we talked. Their Jimmy was in business in western Canada. Mary was living in her own home with "her man and her baby; and a fine man he is, too; and the child is a wonder." Ann was married and living in Auburn. A family? "To be sure! The finest ye ever see. They've done well, so they have, thim girls, an' they should. Jimmy's doin' fine, too."

Later, Mr. Grandy and I went to the same old pasture for the cow. Then, while he milked and "did up the chores" and Mrs. Grandy prepared supper, I stepped over to the post-office for my mail, which had been forwarded from New York.

The little old lady who handed me a number of letters was so excited she could scarcely speak: "Please excuse me, sir, I mean . . . that is . . . we have been so interested in those letters. That name . . . we have read all his books. And now it's being said about town that little Harry Wright has come back. I . . . I . . . can't believe . . . no one ever dreamed . . . is it possible, sir . . . are you the author . . . and are you the little boy who used to live here?"

## TO MY SONS

At supper that evening I saw that my host and hostess were troubled. They talked to make conversation and they looked at each other frequently with questioning, doubtful glances.

At last Mr. Grandy said with an offhand air: "The word has gone 'round that ye're in town."

"I suppose so," said I. "Um-m-m, but these potatoes are good!"

"Folks do be sayin' that ye've made a pile o' money out av all thim books ye wrote."

"Not too much," I answered. "I make out to live. This home-made bread and butter makes me feel like a boy again."

"Ye make mebbly two er three thousand a year, do ye?"

"Sometimes. Could I have another glass of milk, please, Mrs. Grandy?"

"Wal, think av that now! Two an' mebbly three thousand in a year." He shot a glance at "the woman," as he always called her. "Wal, would ye think av that—an' the skinny little chap that ye war!"

Mrs. Grandy was silent.

Then he cautiously drew another verbal step nearer the thing that was troubling them. "The Squire, up at the big house, he's heard that ye're here."

"Yes?"

"Yes, I seen him meself a while ago, when ye war at the post-office. They'll be comin' to fetch ye. They're a wantin' ye to stay the night wid thim at the big house. 'Tis more like what you're used to, I'm thinkin'."

## TO MY SONS

"I'll not go."

The old couple exchanged excited looks.

"Ye'll not?" said Mr. Grandy. "Ye'll not be goin' to visit with the Squire and stay the night at the big house?"

"I will not. I'm going with you two to see Mary, this evening. Then we're coming right back home. The Squire and his big house be hanged."

"What did I tell ye, Jim?" cried Mrs. Grandy, triumphantly. "Did I not say what he'd do? Didn't I tell ye that's the kind av a man he's growed up to be? Av course he'll be stayin' with us, an' he'll sleep in our own Jimmie's bed in the little room upstairs under the roof, Gawd be praised!"

The next morning I went alone to some of the scenes of my boyhood. To the little cottage where we first lived in Sennett; to the place where my artist-farmer friend had revealed to me that other world which is so different from the world of poverty; to the old house on the hill so rich in memories of my companionship with mother; to the farm where I worked immediately after her death, and to that other farm where we made rain-water vinegar and I tended the sheep.

It all came back to me, vivid and real, but strangely enough it was not as if I had lived it. It was as if I had written it in a book. Something within me echoed the postmistress's question: Was it indeed true? Was I that little Harry Wright who used to live there? Or was it all just another of my foolish, sentimental tales?

THE END

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